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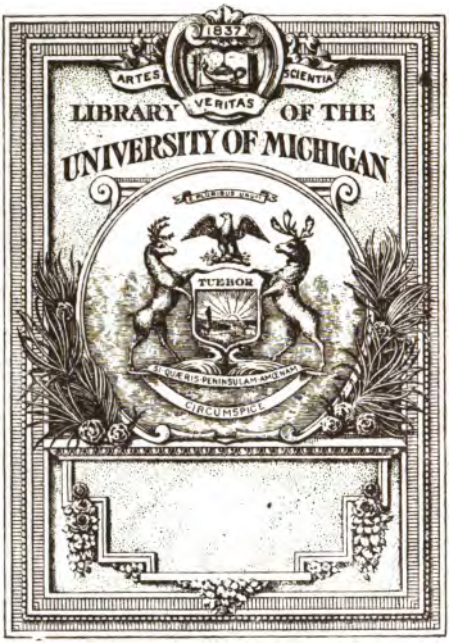
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MARIONETTES

BY

JULIEN GORDON

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MARIONETTES

CHAPTER I.

SO she was dead. He was free. But his liberty brought no such joy as its announcement once would have given. There had been a time when he had wanted it. Desire and fate rarely clinch. Now he read the lines stupidly, with but little agitation. He took off his glasses, dimmed with the smoke from his long clay pipe, and looked over at his son John, across the dining table. This was her son too. Something must be said, done—what? What did respectable, well-regulated people do and say on such occasions? He hemmed and cleared his throat; but he could not entirely clear his

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brain for the wine he had drunk, and John too was a little somnolent after his heavy dinner and his befuddling brandy. He, John, was lolling back in his chair, with his long legs astraddle, smoking a cigar, not a pipe, his hands in his pockets, his big ears to windward, and a frown on his low, rather brutal forehead. John was, in fact, not brutal. He was a perfectly amiable person; only the fairies who had given him strength of thew, sinew, and muscle, at his birth, stout fists and thick hair, had been chary of one gift which some people think important—the mind was lacking. Not entirely; there were flashes of shrewdness, even of wit, sometimes, a clear, dry wit with no laughter in it. But generally there was the sluggish pall of apathy. This gave him that puzzled, cruel look one sees on the faces of some dogs, but it was all on the surface; John's heart and impulses were kindly, although it is to be supposed that if he had ever been very angry he might have

been, like the dog, dangerous. Even in his wine he was dull, not quarrelsome. A person's true propensities come out at such moments. They are fierce, frolicsome, amorous, or sleepy; you can gauge the man fairly well in the cup.

The thin white horse had flopped up from the village—his gait cannot be more accurately described—dragging behind him the rackety wagon which conveyed parcels and messages to and from the telegraph and express offices. Mr. Becket, his owner, who had driven him, blew into the hall upon a wind gust, his beard saturated with rain, and his yellow tobacco-stained-mustache held between his teeth, just as Almeric, the negro butler, neared the door. Mr. Becket had grown tired of waiting in the storm, and had himself turned the door-knob, which had yielded to his pressure. When Almeric had seen "Death" on the envelope he had paled as well as a negro can—he had done his best—then, on tiptoe, he had ventured

to the dining room where his master sat, and had, in portentous silence, thrust the thing into the older man's hand. He now waited outside breathlessly, with a certain pleasurable perturbation. It was not often anything so weighty happened. He thought he would linger and see. He was glad he had not gone out, over to the cottage, with his wife Jane; he would have missed the excitement. For after all, in these things, it is the first shock that thrills.

John was dozing, but Mr. Breckinridge was awake. He was apt to be awake; he was an excitable man, in spite of his great size and adipose tissue. He did not notice Almeric's importunate presence. He spoke to his son.

"John," he said—then he cleared his throat and spat toward the open grate, where some logs were burning brightly, "John."

"Well," said John, opening his small blue eyes, and stretching his big hands

out toward the flame, "I declare, I think I was asleep!"

"John," said Mr. Breckinridge, "here's a telegram."

"Humph," said John, "is it about the derrick? Clinch says——"

"No sir," said Mr. Breckinridge in a loud voice, "it is not about the derrick, nor is it about Clinch. Your mother is dead;" and he handed the bit of paper to the newly bereaved, across the back of his chair. John started to his feet. "My mother? my mother?" He took the paper and went up to the table, and read it close to the lamp which stood among the wine glasses. This is what he read:

"Mamma died this morning, after three days of illness. I was with her. The funeral will be from Craven Manor, Saturday. I shall return at once to Henri, at Bretauche.—BERTHA."

John turned the words about in his red fingers. He looked grave and a little

frightened. There didn't seem to be much to say. "It must have been sudden," he ventured at last.

"Lor' bless you!" exclaimed Almeric with dramatic intensity.

"Is there any answer?" bawled Mr. Becket from the hall. "That there horse of mine aint had his supper."

"Is there any answer?" asked John, dazed.

"You had better telegraph to your sister," said Mr. Breckinridge, scowling.

"What shall I say?" asked John, scratching his head.

"Lord ha' mercy!" ejaculated Almeric.

"Will you hold your tongue, you fool?" Mr. Breckinridge glared at his servant angrily. John had gone to a writing desk; he sat down fumbling among some papers.

"Tell Bertha," said Mr. Breckinridge more gently, "that we have received

her message." John wrote out the address:

Marquise LE MOYNE,
Craven Manor,
ST. MARY'S, OXON.,

and then he wrote, "Received your message." He brought it over to his father. "Seems short," he said.

"Well, why in God's name don't you make it longer then?" said Mr. Breckinridge under his breath.

"Say something about—eh—sympathy?" asked John tentatively. "Say something about its being sudden?"

His father nodded, closing his thick purple lips tightly together, still frowning. John lumbered back to the desk, and blotted his thumb and forefinger with these added tributes to sentiment and decency. Almeric, startled into muteness, took the missive from his hands. In a moment the front door had banged upon Mr. Becket, whose hungry nag announced by a neigh of thankfulness

his happy assurance of returning to the stall. The only other sound that woke the echoes of outer darkness was the occasional angry beat of a wave on the sands, as it tossed moaning at the foot of the lawn.

Once more the two were left together. What was changed? Not much it would seem; yet a restless embarrassment possessed them, and on the older man's face there was an expression, as he looked at his son, at once apologetic and dogged. His new enfranchisement seemed to sit uneasily upon him. After a while John said, "I haven't seen mamma for twelve years."

"I never prevented it," said Mr. Breckinridge, to which his son answered nothing.

"I guess," said John, "when she wrote asking it, last summer, I ought to have gone over." And now it was Mr. Breckinridge's turn to remain silent.

By and by he leaned back and put on

his glasses again. "Where is the miniature?" he asked shortly.

"It is in the walnut desk in my gun-room."

"Get it."

John rose, obedient to the command. It was nearly a half-hour afterward that he returned with a shabby leather case in his hand. He was rubbing the dust from it with his handkerchief. His father took it from him and touched the spring. It revealed the face of a young woman whom even the namby-pamby art of the miniature painter of fifty years ago had not robbed of a certain individual grace. She wore a white camellia in her brown hair, and the prune-box conception of the painter had been unable, under the conventional smirk, to disguise the proud curve of beautiful and haughty lips.

"It is an excellent likeness," said the widower. "Your mother was beautiful." We accord beauty to our enemies more readily than any other attribute. I once

heard a lady say of her son's wife, "She is handsome." It sounded like the blood-spurt of a full heart where the knife strikes. Had she said, "She is a baggage," it could not have carried a graver imputation.

John leaned over the portrait and contemplated it. "My poor mother!" he said. Mr. Breckinridge opened his mouth, but no sound came forth. He closed it sharply, as if on second thoughts. Looking once again, after all the years, into those eyes, he had felt a stirring and recurrence of that hate which now for so long had lain dormant. For he never could think of his wife without remembering the wrongs she had inflicted upon him. Those she had borne at his hands seemed to him now so paltry and trivial in comparison. He had hated her as weak men hate strong women, when their own natures are not altogether light and incapable of sustained resentment. Sustained resentment indicates a certain

depth. Forgiving natures are generally shallow ones. Cultivated, the virtue of forgiveness becomes impressive. Incapacity of a righteous indignation is sometimes merely a form of perversion, if not of depravity. It belongs to mean and frivolous souls.

Adrian Breckinridge, with all his faults and even his vices, had not been depraved. He remembered now the evening on which she had left him forever, that evening when he had abased himself before her, confessed his sins, and besought her absolution. How she had, in this moment of his penitence, turned and reviled him, scathing him with her contempt, her scorn, even her ridicule. She had always laughed at him. In those days he had not been devoid of vanity, and the wounds to vanity heal slowly. He remembered how she had gone up and awakened little Bertha, who was asleep in her cot, taken the child, and left his roof forever. John had been away at school

then, so that she could not take him too, and after much wrangling of lawyers, and threats and insults bandied from wife to husband, and from husband to wife, the boy had been left to him, and she had gone away with his daughter. Let me see; Bertha then was nine years old, and John was twelve, and it was now twenty-three years ago. Since that hour Adrian Breckinridge had not seen his womankind. He had been bidden to come to his daughter's marriage, but he had answered with bitterest denial and reproach. What? his girl married to a Frenchman, a possible adventurer and certain libertine? When later he had known that the man had been young and handsome, and clean and wholesome, well-born and well-mannered, rich, brave, and in love, he still thought of it savagely, as of a great sacrifice and outrage, and had only felt a little compunction when he had heard that at Gravelotte Le Moyne had been killed at the first fire,

and that a horse's hoofs had trodden out of all recognition his fresh young face. He had written to his daughter, then, kindly, and she had replied affectionately. She had been in the habit of writing to him always, about twice a year, short and perfunctory letters. As he remembered her now, to-night, he only thought she must be gentler than her mother.

A few years after his wife had left him he had formed another attachment, an attachment to a woman who would be married or left alone. He had tried to gain a legal separation, to shake off the trammels that bound him. But against this his wife had strenuously, tenaciously, resolutely fought. And she had conquered; she always did. The woman he adored married another man, a little later, and he—who had thought this his one chance of a better life—but perhaps he was mistaken—had returned to easier and vulgarer amours. It was

then that he had sunk the lowest. People had almost begun to shun him; people who liked him; for Adrian Breckinridge, in spite of all, was likable, nay lovable. What is this trait, this essence, which pervades some beings? Possibly it is a touch of the pathetic, which the most unedifying conduct has not entirely extinguished. Weakness makes all human nature kin. But if his wife had had a weakness he had not discovered it. She had seemed to him always hard, dry, and violent.

They had found how unsuited they were to each other in the very early days of their married life. Both of them were good-looking, highly connected, rich; the marriage had promised well, and the fact that the young man was a little wild had not weighed much in the balance. His *fiancée's* father was not living. Mothers sometimes prefer a splendid marriage for their daughters to a safe one. Fathers are wiser. Mrs. Breckinridge's mother

had consoled herself with the thought that a young fellow left early in full control of fortune was apt to be gay. It is so difficult to see clearly in such matters at the low level of present civilization. She had since had ample leisure to regret her imprudence. The poor lady had found that even the brilliancy of the alliance had not proved permanent. Soon after the nuptials there had been unfortunate investments, and a fortune reputed colossal had dwindled to very ordinary dimensions. There was wealth, no doubt, in plenty even, but not so stupendous as to obscure what was lacking in other quarters. All this had happened long ago, years before my story opens, and it is of to-days, not of yesterdays, that it would tell. To-day here was John. His advent had wrought a change. When he had failed to get through college, failed to be admitted at the bar, failed here and there and everywhere, and finally swamped his hundred thousands in a western cattle

ranch, his father had peremptorily ordered him to come home. He had now given him the management of the home farm. Amateur farming is proverbially more expensive than productive; but nevertheless it is a gentlemanly occupation for a man of leisure and of some fortune. On the whole it had been wise. John was stupid and fond of his toddy, but John was moral, and a parent does not like to blush before his child. From the day that John Breckinridge arrived to stay definitely, Adrian "pulled up," as the phrase is. He was, at any rate, less careless of appearances, and gradually began to reinstate himself in the minds of neighbors who liked him enough, for his genial personality, to be easily placated. An arduous sincerity in opinion and ideas of conduct is not necessarily connected with intolerance. Christ was tolerant. A person is much else besides virtuous or vicious. It is not always for his virtues or vices that we love or shrink from an-

other. Monotonous praise or blame damps all critical analysis.

It was a queer old house that the two men lived in; large, roomy, built in a hollow, as was the custom in the old days, when a sheltered spot was chosen for the home, not a commanding one. From its windows one could barely catch a few broken glimpses of the sea, but the trees that waved on the lawn saw its expanse, and the roses that bloomed by the gate drew into their yellow petals its salty odors. There was a sadness about the gray stucco habitation, with its central building, its wings, its wide, flat roof, and the great columns of the portico which paled and peeled in the sun. Yet in its surroundings there was the charm of a certain peace. Its very dilapidation suggested a tempest-worn vessel returning on an autumn night from a summer voyage.

Adrian Breckinridge had swamped all ambitions in the general wreck of his do-

mestic bark, and the home he lived in, like the grounds which environed it, presented a neglected aspect. This was not parsimony ; it was the lack of all firm and generous hopes. There is no object in an arduous labor which shall be fruitless of joy. The garden, which had once been the show and pride of the neighborhood, had perhaps lost least from its general air of decay. When young Mrs. Breckinridge had been brought to her husband's country abode she had been delighted by this quaint garden, with its straight walks and borders modeled after stately European pattern. To-day that it was a ruin, a person of imagination would still have found in it much, if not more, of poetic grace. The brush of time's wing had overturned the numerous statues, fauns, satyrs, nymphs, or at best knocked them about and disfigured them. Many of them lay low amid the grasses, where they reposed half hidden and mutilated. A few stone seats, now crumbling, were eaten

away by damp green mosses. Two or three marble vases still rose upon their pedestals. Though grown dark with the years, they were kept filled with trailing plants, which swung in the winds that blew from across the box-bordered alleys. For the rest, great disorder; arbors half fallen, parterres overgrown with tangle of flowers and weeds, all caprice and riot in those places which had once been full of coquetry and care. Clematis and honeysuckle vainly climbing upon trelliswork, which would presently give way under their loose embraces. The rosebushes, no more now than thorny, uncut shrubs, were still, however, crowned by blossoms of every scent and hue. Great sad lilies lifted their golden beauty to the sky, unpicked and uncultured. Large silent spiders darted in and out, spinning their webs unmolested, catching in their golden tissues unsuspecting flies that buzzed innocently near. Over all a tepid quiet and repose and hush. It was as if a

queen might one day have walked here, and left behind her some vestige of her greatness and of her beauty; as if the memory of exquisite things she had said and done haunted forever the spot which guarded so well her secrets.

And quite at the further end, which stopped abruptly under the hill, there was a wide bed of white violets, which, in the spring, perfumed the air with its delicate, frightened fragrance.

Once in a great while visitors drove in to see the place. It still had a repute of superiority. Young people would beg to be allowed to run wild a few moments in those pretty lost paths, pick a few flowers, and awaken the echoes with laughter and with life. But this was very rarely; and the two men who lived in the old house never went into the garden. For one it was tenanted by unpleasant memories, to the other it said

nothing. Its message, therefore, remained on its own heart, and fell upon the damp earth which it enriched as did the dead leaves of the flower-petals, shaken by the winds.

CHAPTER II.

THE *roué* and *bon vivant* who breaks a woman's heart often respects her purse. So had it been with Adrian Breckinridge. He had not been a model of sobriety or of fidelity, but in monetary affairs he had not only been scrupulously honest and just, but had often been large-handed and generous. His wife in these matters had felt infinite trust in his integrity. There had been no legal unknotting of the tie which had held these two people bound together; their property had therefore remained undivided, and administered by the same agent. Mr. Breckinridge had himself overlooked its proper distribution, adding a handsome allowance from his own private resources for his wife's and

daughter's maintenance. The death of the former caused certain necessary complications, which required his immediate attention. He was not engaged in any career, professional or financial. The care of his property was in excellent hands, so that he rarely went into the city now. But on the morning after the telegram he and John had themselves carried to the station for an early train.

They went, upon their arrival in the city, to the house on the Square, which remained the greater part of the year in the hands of a man and his wife, old servants. Its windows and shutters were only opened once a week for an airing. Its pictures, chandeliers, and stiff furniture were duly shrouded in dust-colored linen.

To-day there were some papers to find, which were locked up in Mr. Breckinridge's town study; so the father and son were conveyed, by the cab which had

brought them from the ferry, to the town home. The papers having been untombed, hastily examined, and forced into a bag, they once more emerged from the cold, dark halls of their uninhabited mansion, into the crisp, snowy air. They walked down a side street toward the crowded thoroughfare that would take them "down town," the young man with his somewhat awkward shamble, the older one more alert, in spite of his sixty years and of his obesity. At the corner, a fashionable hatter, who also displayed in his windows canes, umbrellas, men's gloves and neckties, flaunted an enticing sign which announced that he was hatter to all the distinguished people in a world overstrained to contain its insignificant ones. Here, at this door, John came to a sudden halt. There was a resolute gleam in his opaque eye.

"Well?" said Mr. Breckinridge, senior.

"I guess we had better go in here," said John.

"Why, my hat's a new one," said Mr. Breckinridge, *père*, "and yours——"

"I think we ought to blacken up," said John, "I'm going to, at any rate." There was something combative in the sound of his voice.

Mr. Breckinridge stopped and stared narrowly at his son; and then, "All right," he said, "you can go in. I will wait for you."

"I think you had better do it too," said John huskily.

"What the devil . . ." but something in his son's face arrested him. The two men entered the store. A lank, black-haired clerk bustled up to them. John sheepishly took off his hat and handed it to him, murmuring some almost inaudible words.

"Certainly, sir, what degree?" to which John again seemed to make an unintelligible reply. Now there was a most striking resemblance between the two men, and their consanguinity could hardly

have been concealed, in spite of their marked dissimilarities. Anyone, everyone seeing them together would have said, "Father and son!" The clerk turned to Mr. Breckinridge, with a perfunctory lowering of the head and drawn corner of the mouth. "Widower, sir?" he asked, snapping his brown eyes in affected sympathy.

Mechanically Mr. Breckinridge had already taken off his hat. He held it gingerly, with a silly, vacuous expression. The clerk swept the two hats from their hands with a sudden lurch. "Wife and mother!" he shouted to another man who was leaning over a distant counter.

"Wife and mother!" took up this personage, straightening himself up, and bowling on the words, with a new impetus, into a near recess, a recess which veiled discreetly from human vision certain processes of tribute given unto Cæsar; the tribute of order and of rule.

"Wife and mother, and be quick about

it, the gents are in a hurry!" a voice from the depths reiterated.

John, in the meanwhile, had inquired for black gloves, and a necktie which would be equally suitable. His hands shook with a certain determined energy. "Here is your size, sir," he said decidedly to his surviving parent. Mr. Breckinridge, with whom "no" had always been the common interjection, not "yes," must have been staggered then and ever afterward at his own marvelous docility; it remained in the domain of the unexplained. Sufficient it is for us to know that in five minutes he had forced his puffy hands into a pair of wide black kids, exchanged his wine-colored scarf for a dusky one, and that he and John had even purchased, and ornamented themselves before the looking-glass, each in turn, with dead-jet scarf pins. When the hats were brought forth, by and by, one enveloped to the top in its somber pall, the other's requirements having been fulfilled with

an inch of compromise from the upper rim, they sallied forth, as respectable mourners as any two country gentlemen need wish to be, into the brightness of the winter's morning.

John's extreme conservatism was not deficient in these occasional surprises. Possibly, it so expressed itself. Strangely enough, it generally imposed upon his father, and the *rôles* of leader and led were temporarily reversed. They said nothing to each other about the change in their apparel. It was, however, closely noted and commented upon by a few stragglers in the train, which they caught at twilight. The late Admiral Horner's daughters, who were returning from a shopping tour, were deeply interested. These ladies had not much to amuse them beyond the annals of their dull neighborhood. Time, tide, and fashion had left them stranded in their manor house on the hill. Life was a little bleak. The black hats of the Breckin-

ridge pair were hailed with signs of considerable perturbation. On the whole they thought it a handsome thing in Adrian Breckinridge to so recognize the demise of a wife who, in their estimation, had been anything but dutiful. It it surprising how leniently elderly and virtuous maidens sometimes judge male derelictions, tempering the mildness of their criticisms with an almost ferocious severity of onslaught upon the minor lapses of their sister women. When they poured out tea into their dainty teacups, at their late meal, they were still talking of the Breckinridges.

"I wonder," said Miss Anne, "Sister Jane, if Bertha Le Moyne will come out now and see her papa. I think it would be only proper."

"She was a pretty child," said Sister Jane irrelevantly.

"Such long hair," said Maria.

"I suppose she is grown quite a Frenchwoman now," said Miss Anne.

"She sent out a photograph to Mrs. St. Clair the other day. It had a foreign look."

"There's one she'd find changed," said Jane. "Why Lollia St. Clair was only twelve when Bertha used to play with her, before her mamma took her away."

"Who was there when you called, Sister Anne?" asked Maria.

"Oh, only little Mrs. Mount Cuthbert and——"

"I think we can guess the other person without your mentioning him by name," said Miss Jane dryly.

Miss Maria flushed. "I think it's wicked," she said, "the way people talk."

"You cannot muzzle the world if you give it food for scandal," said Miss Jane, who was the clever woman of the family.

"I shall never believe any harm of Lollia; she was a sweet-tempered, affectionate child," said Maria, who was the romantic one, and whose province it was to overflow, and fill the chinks and

crevices in the conversation. "She had such lovely eyes!"

"She didn't compare with Bertha Breckinridge; she was always a coarse type; but we cannot tell how Bertha has turned out, and Lollia certainly is a fine-looking woman."

"Nonsense, sister!" said Jane; "Mr. Cranston saw her last year, at Homburg—Bertha, I mean—and says she is very pretty. Anybody would think you lived at the Antipodes; why don't you keep your ears open?"

"What were Mrs. Mount Cuthbert and Lollia and Mr. Odenried doing?" asked Jane after a pause.

"Oh, just chatting at the piazza steps together. Mr. Odenried had ridden over; he did not stop long; he went away directly."

"You frightened him off, Sister Anne," said Maria, smiling. Her withered visage looked like a baked apple in the yellow gloom of the candlelight.

"I think it would take more than Anne to frighten him away from *that* piazza corner," said Jane Horner sententiously, shaking her head.

"He is wonderful to look at, anyway," said Miss Maria boldly.

"I should say," said Miss Jane, "Lollia St. Clair had better be looking at her own husband." It is extraordinary how keen are the parental and conjugal instincts where no taxes have been levied upon their fresh enthusiasms. "But as to wonderful, I think he is a most overestimated young man. I, for one, never could see anything in him."

To this Maria replied nothing. Jane was clever, but there were things in the universe she felt that even Jane had not seen or known. They were closed to her sister forever: these things veiled and hidden, which she herself had vaguely guessed with alarm and a certain self-reproach. When she saw Lollia St. Clair and Odenried dash by on horseback, fol-

lowed by this lady's smart English groom, it made her foolish, innocent heart beat with a sort of reprehensible wildness. She invariably ran to her window, at the distant sound of the hoofs, and watched them until they were well out of sight. She always tried to hide from her sisters, however, the fact that she had seen these two together; and this concealment, this divagation, was the only dark blot upon the pure truthfulness of her stainless conscience. It is a question if devotion to stern duty can possibly require us to do evil to others. At any rate, it will always remain an agonizing one to the sensitive and the pitiful. When she tried to conceal from her sisters that she had seen Mrs. St. Clair and Odenried together, her motives were noble ones. There are sometimes motives to good which remain themselves in the category of forbidden things. Miss Maria's prevarications on what she saw out of her window had no

base inspiration. She was small, dark, and thin, but she had a large, white, and candid soul.

It was about eighteen months after the bands of woe had been adjusted upon the headgear of the Breckinridge gentlemen, and they were already rusty, if not discarded, when their daughter and sister, Bertha Le Moyne, set sail for her native shores.

Certain complications about the property, and a suggestion that John should go to her in France, had been answered by the announcement that she would herself immediately embark. The cable which heralded her decision convulsed the paternal mansion as with a galvanic shock of expectancy. Adrian was not conventional, but he had been born a gentleman, and still understood the fitness of things. There were long conferences between himself, his son, the foreman, and the gardener. The village carpenter was also invoked. It was

decided, in these secret conclaves, that something must be done to put the homestead and its environment into fair order, before they could be fit to receive the daughter of a house which had not been graced by a feminine presence for a period of more than twenty years. The days which elapsed between her message and herself, were passed by Mr. Breckinridge in desperate efforts to make the establishment fit to receive a young and presumably luxurious woman.

An apartment consisting of two or three bed-chambers was hastily papered with more or less success as to taste and pattern. A modern bath was introduced into its dressing room. The large yellow drawing room was opened, aired, dusted, and some bright rugs purchased to cover the threadbare spots in the Aubusson carpet. An awning was sent for to the stable, and patched up to do service upon the back piazza.

Then the grounds! The garden was hastily raked up, picked over, and cleaned. It was fortunately hopeless, and so they failed to spoil it. At the gate some splendid red and purple fuchsias were disposed in pots ranged in stiff rows, as a sort of cheerful welcome against the dark background of evergreens. Mr. Breckinridge was very painstaking over the disposition of these flowers. He grubbed over them with his awkward, gouty hands, his tongue in his cheek, and his face on fire, perspiring and snorting impotently from his distended nostrils. John hung about, standing upon his heels; a spirit of restlessness seemed to have invaded him. He was always walking back and forth, from the farm to the house, standing about helplessly, with his hands in his pockets and his hat on the back of his head. "Girls like sweet-smelling things," he said one day, when his father found him sowing some mignonette seeds under the windows which were intended

to be those of the marquise's special apartment. Her rooms were upon the ground floor.

"That's so," said Mr. Breckinridge. "Here, Tom," he called out to the gardener, "you had better dig out some of those white violets, and make a border for this bed. And here, cut down those two dead branches, they obstruct the view." It was a general transformation.

Power has two expressions, strength which bears, and suffers, and suppresses, force which strikes, shrivels, blasts, and uproots. Bertha Le Moyne's unseen influence seemed to have a measure of the latter quality.

CHAPTER III.

SHE looked, however, more like a tall sapling which bows to the gale than like the lightning-bolt which destroys, when, by John before and a brakeman behind, she was hoisted up to the platform of the drawing-room car, which, trembling behind its engine, was to convey her to Hornersville. This was the euphonious name of the station from which she would drive, through a flat country, for seven or eight miles, toward the shore. On this shore itself, a mile from Breckinridge House, there was a little fishing settlement, through which they would pass. It was called Breckinridge Hollow, in honor of her father's family. He owned a greater part of the land about him. He had distributed it at low rents to the fishermen and clam-dig-

gers. These had built their huts in proximity to the water, where their marketable industry promised some measure of remuneration.

The advent of John Breckinridge and his sister into the car had produced a visible sensation. There were several overfatigued, carelessly dressed, elderly business men with flaccid cravats and weary faces; and a few younger ones, whose appearance expressed a greater respect for fashion. There were the Misses Larned, who had been down for a day to the boat race, and were coming home with sunburnt noses beneath their cocky tarpaulin hats. They were disporting themselves under the chaperonage of a young married lady, who was herself escorted by a white flannel youth in a straw hat with a blue ribbon about it. He wore white shoes, and a blue silk sash tied about his middle, reminding one forcibly of the unfortunate husband in his bridal toggery, as he appears in the third

act of the opera of "The Huguenots." Indeed, had his trousers, which were rolled to his ankles, but been pushed up to the knee, and a frill of lace stitched thereon, he could have filled with ease the part of that long-suffering and complacent puppet. He and the Larned girls kept up a constant fire of rather loud and witless talk. His sallies must have amused these young ladies if they failed to awaken the humor of the other passengers, since every word he uttered was met by peals of a rather shrill and prolonged laughter. The married lady seemed to have a headache. She held up her hands, now and then, to her forehead, giving voice to whining, childish plaints while she smelt vigorously at a bottle of lavender salts. Now and then the youth in the sash would turn to do her bidding, lowering a blind and adjusting a footstool under her small, arched foot, of which she made a rather forced exhibition.

Directly in front of the seat into which the Marquise Le Moyne had sunk wearily, were two of the Misses Horner; they had again made a pilgrimage to the Mecca of cooks and spring bonnets—and they were returning with both these necessities. The first, breathless, hot, already belligerent, hugging a brown paper parcel, in lieu of the trunk, which could not be sent for until the place had been thoroughly investigated, was sitting in the rear car. The last, in three neat bandboxes, were ranged in the wire cage above their heads. The Misses Horner were indulging, after their day's campaign, in a mild orgy of chocolate creams, and they passed and repassed the pink paper bag with its golden letters, over the frayed magenta arm of Miss Jane's chair. Madame Le Moyne settled herself back with a smothered sigh in hers. Her maid unfastened her long, light cloak for her, relieved her of her porte-monnaie, and revived her with a fan. After which Justine pulled up the

green linen shade, and was soon absorbed in the fast-flying landscape.

Madame Le Moyne did not look out. Her eyes became fastened, as if fascinated, upon the faces of the two women before her. One of them had false teeth ; the other had evidently kept her own—such as they were. They both ate their candy with some difficulty and splutter, with a relish born of an entire absence of coquetry in the achievement. It is perhaps in eating that a woman's vanity is most quickly evident. The loss of it is as sure a sign of age as is a man's garrulity about his ancestors. Where appetite dulls daintiness, time has begun his sure and fatal devastation. Bertha watched them, and so watching, shivered.

"Here, sister, here's one of those large ones you like!" said Anne, peering with eager eye into the sack, and pouncing upon a lollipop bigger than its fellows. It was taken by Miss Jane with considerable avidity, and was soon protruding in the

hollow of her dim cheek. She chewed it with gusto, smacking her lips, taking her time. Her scant wisps of dirty gray hair were tightly wound up from her thin, lank *nuque;* a few stray ones escaped, and through the chance of travel were straggled on the collar of her black bombazine jacket. Her bonnet had fallen back a little, in the struggle of the day's warfare, displaying a part three fingers wide and the skin of her livid scalp. Her eyes—once fine and not devoid of fire—were now so surrounded by fine wrinkles as to be almost invisible. They had growing tarnished with the years, and their pervading expression was one of a foolish curiosity.

Her sister Anne, younger and stouter, had a wide mouth and turned-over nostrils. Her plain black bonnet, whose front presented the appearance of a formidable rampart, was held over her temples by a jagged veil. Upon its crown rose a high, stiff black ribbon bow, upon which

the dust of a long day in town had left its mark. It would be duly brushed when she reached home, this bow, turned inside out, blown upon and caressed—the Misses Horner were immaculately neat; but just now its dinginess was not beautified by these indications of the city's conflicts.

Madame Le Moyne continued to gaze at the two old maids as if spellbound, while they cackled together over their candy, about the cook in the back car, the three bonnets in their bandboxes, and the day's small experiences. And as she gazed her heart contracted, and she could not have told which filled it the most, disgust or pity. She looked at the yellow, sickly faces, with their leather complexions and sunken jowls, and asked herself with a shudder, "Shall I, too, one day be like this?" and the answer was the one word, "Horrible!" She turned to her maid Justine, whose pretty profile was still crushed against the hurrying pane, turned

with a sense of loneliness and that heaviness of soul that had possessed her ever since she had stepped upon the gang plank, and had met the shy though cordial greeting of her brother John. He, John, was ensconced in a seat across the aisle, with his pot hat pushed away from his thick short hair, and his face hidden in the shadow of an evening paper.

Justine looked up and smiled at her mistress, then following her eyes to where the Misses Horner sat, "*Mon Dieu!*" she said, raising her hands in deprecation, "*en voilà-t-il des sorcières!*"

In the meantime the car had become aware of the stranger's presence. Madame Le Moyne heard the Misses Horner comment upon it, and even caught her name in the whispered suggestion, from one to the other, that they should speak to her. The explosive Misses Larned forgot to giggle, while Mrs. Mount Cuthbert—for this was their chaperon's name—forgot her headache. Even the

Huguenot bridegroom desisted from his jokes, and took a long stare. The elderly business men stopped discussing stocks, and the younger ones making bids on to-morrow's races. They began to settle their neckties, and hastily brushed themselves off with flapping handkerchiefs. Yet so embarrassed and self-conscious were they all, that not one advanced to welcome the new arrival, or dared ask John for an introduction.

Finding herself an object of keenest interest to her nearest neighbors, the marquise was fain to remove her eyes from their contemplation. It had not tended to cheer her. With a languid hand she opened the book that lay upon her lap. It was Tolstoï's "Life." She opened it at this passage: "Animal existence is for man the spade given to a rational being, in order that he may dig with it; and as he digs, dull and sharpen it and wear it out; but not to be polished up and laid away." Then she closed the

book and began to think. Was this all true, then? Should this decay and deterioration and death really have a wholesome and desirable effect? Did Tolstoï believe what he wrote? How great and good and large he must be! She caught sight, in the narrow strip of looking-glass which separated the wainscoting, of her own smooth cheek, of a wave of her soft hair, and a rebellion, the rebellion of a heart that has not drunk its fill of life, rose and choked her. "It is terrible, terrible!" she said to herself. "How can we destroy this thirst for happiness, for joy, for rapture, this consuming discontent, these restless impulses? what mean they, and how stifle them? I know the necessity of submitting heart and intelligence to artificial institutions—who better? I know that lawlessness cannot, must not, defy authority. I know we must yield to the thought and temper of others. But how difficult to stem the movement of our desires!" These frag-

mentary reflections may prove to the reader that Madame Le Moyne was something of an analyst and an anarchist. Fortunately there lay in her yet, amid these somewhat morbid manifestations, a strong undercurrent of salutary activity, a vivid appreciation of the good things of the world, and a marked capacity for action. It was with no enervated step that she sprang from the car at Hornersville, and was safely ensconced in the Breckinridge family ark, with Almeric in attendance on the coachman's box, in an old overcoat of his master's, which was too wide for him, and a clean pair of white cotton gloves. Style had gone overboard years ago. Nevertheless, the daughter of the house was received by this amiable retainer with a considerable degree of pompous dignity. "Lor' bless us, Mis' Bertha," he said, touching his hat with a flourish. "You's beautifuller than when you went away!"

"Thank you, Almeric," said Madame

Le Moyne, smiling, "that is indeed an agreeable welcome!" She spoke English perfectly, and a slight, very slight, French accent might have been only an idiosyncrasy of her own speech. It is the first few years of life which set the tongue.

Her father hurried down the steps, when they at last reached the house, and met her at the carriage door. "Well, well! Dear me! Dear me!" he said, nervous, fidgety, and somewhat abashed.

"Dear papa," said Madame Le Moyne, alighting, "how pretty the old place looks! I remember everything, everything, except those lovely fuchsias at the gate; they are new to me. I was quite dazzled." She had noticed the horticultural display; that was well. Mr. Breckinridge touched his coarse lips to the young woman's pale forehead. As he did so he was conscious of a queer sensation, a rush of something like tenderness toward this woman child of his from

whom, for so many years, he had been ruthlessly parted. "I hope you are well. I hope you are comfortable—I hope we can make you comfortable," he repeated, breathing shortly, and preceding her into the house. "I would have gone to meet you, but I thought it would be dull for you to find no welcome here at the old place. Quick, Almeric, take this bag, and John, show—escort your sister and her maid to their rooms." So with an almost old-fashioned courtesy the Marquise Le Moyne was ushered and installed in the home of her childhood.

She found roses upon her dressing table, and the open windows admitted a sweet fragrance of damp earth and newly mown grasses. She leaned out. "The place is attractive; how well I remember it!" Then she looked up at the hideous new walls, and down at the brilliant carpeting. "And the house could be made habitable if one stayed long enough to make it worth while. How stout papa

has grown, and red, and John looks like a plowboy. Ah, well! they need a woman here."

She began to take off her hat, while Justine busied herself unstrapping the trunks and boxes which Mr. Becket had just lumbered up from the station.

"Monsieur Henri would like the beach, here, Justine," she said. "I saw such a nice place for him to play."

"Humph!" said Justine.

"Is it not a pretty drive from the gate, Justine?"

"I prefer the poplar avenue at Bretauche, madame; it is more to my taste."

"Everybody likes his own best, but there are all sorts of entrances, Justine. That is stately and formal and straight. This is wild and natural and winding." But Justine shook her head. It was evident she did not think much of Breckinridge House.

"I don't know, I am sure, what madame

is going to do to amuse herself," she said after a pause. "It is but a *triste* place, and the country a desert, no *châteaux*, no parks, no people, no *mouvement*."

"Oh, but there are neighbors scattered about here," said Madame Le Moyne, determined to be cheerful. "There is a lady living here I have always been intimate with. I used to play with her when I was a little child. She is married and has a country-place here; I am told it is very fine. She is a gay lady. Her Christian name is Lollia. Don't you think that is a very pretty name, Justine?"

"It is extraordinary," said Justine, "but it says nothing to me. But madame knows what suits her." With this scant encouragement Madame Le Moyne prepared to don her dinner gown. It had to be conceded that her efforts at cheerfulness had not been met with enthusiasm.

Adrian Breckinridge had also gotten himself into his dinner dress. There had been a desperate but fruitless hunt made

for an evening coat. He had compromised on a pea-jacket and a white cravat, in which strange accouterment he now appeared in the drawing room. He had not been to a dinner party, or in fact to any entertainment for a hundred years; nor had he received guests at home, and his and John's dress coats were reposing in a walnut chest, in the town mansion on the Square. That very evening, Mrs. Talbot, the housekeeper, was sent a postal in which she was requested to find the said garments and express them forthwith to Breckinridge House. For Mr. Breckinridge had issued invitations for a dinner party, in honor of his newly landed daughter, on the following week. For this dinner not only the dress suits were ordered, but a case of china and glass was hastily packed, to which were added some gilded chandeliers, and a musical box which could be wound up to entertain the ladies after the meal, while the gentlemen should be at their smoking.

To-day the table presented almost as incongruous an appearance as the host's costume. Almeric and his wife, to be sure, had done their very best. There were roses in an antique silver dish in the center, and four silver candlesticks had been burnished and did service for the occasion. But an effort to serve the dinner *à la russe* resulted in long delays, and the cold dabs which were brought in from the pantry with a considerable ostentation, by Almeric and his young white assistant, met from the host with a reception almost as frigid as the gravy in which they swam. The vegetables were served in porcelain dishes, which had evidently been subjected to long and painful usage, if their nicked tops and handles told truly the tale of their career. The roast pig, with a posy in his mouth, which brought up the rear of the repast, was discovered at the last moment to be a foot too long for the silver dish on which it rested, and therefore plentifully smeared with grease

the obsolete whiteness of the handsome damask cloth, a cloth which had been put away folded, on the top shelf of the linen closet, for eight years at least. These trifling incidents would in no wise have disturbed the equanimity of the fair newcomer, had they not seemed to strike a note of great dismay and even anguish into the hearts of her father and brother, upon whose countenances were depicted deep lines of anxiety and mortification.

Repeated exclamations of displeasure and annoyance painted still profounder seams of woe upon the dusky features of the conscientious Almeric. The meal was not a gay one. The conversation flagged to a degree which, at times, became oppressive.

Madame Le Moyne, glad to escape as soon as the fruit and cheese had been passed, ran out to the wide veranda, which had been fitted up with chairs, sofas, and tables expressly for her benefit; and it was here that the gentlemen joined her

for their coffee. Before she rose from the table, however, a little scene had been enacted, at which Almeric's jaw extended to such an extent that there seemed imminent signs of dislocation. When his master's and Mr. John's half-tumbler of brandy was brought to them, "What is this you drink?" quoth the marquise.

"Why, brandy," said Mr. Breckinridge.

"And you take all this *eau de vie*—like that, papa, with what you eat? Do you not find it very *échauffant?* Is it not very bad for the stomach?"

"Well, I dare say you are right," Mr. Breckinridge had said. "Here, Almeric, take the infernal stuff away!" And then he had frowned at John, and John too had relinquished his glass.

From the veranda they walked down with her, later, to the tree-shaded lawn, and so toward the beach gate. A young moon had arisen over the Sound. The water was calm and of dense blue color.

Here and there on its dark, almost black surface, small sailing boats pushed their rapid way, leaving behind them a trail of white effulgence. Now and then a sail was hoisted or lowered, a boat's keel scraped a sand reef, a human voice swept through the night in a song which broke its tranquillity.

"Odenried's out to-night," said John, between puffs from his pipe, "and Mount Cuthbert's in his dory, just leaving the Snag."

"You must run out the *Petrel* and take your sister for a sail," said Mr. Breckinridge, "one of these fine evenings."

"Oh, it will be what I like!" said Madame Le Moyne, "to dart about like that under the moon. What a lovely, quiet sea! Have you a good boat, papa?"

"The *Petrel* used to be fast," said Mr. Breckinridge, "but these new-fangled riggings, with their jimcracks and frills, would beat her all hollow, I am afraid,

now. However, she'll slip along in a lady's breeze."

"And who are Mount Cuthbert and Odenried?" asked Madame Le Moyne, feigning an interest she was far from feeling.

"The Mount Cuthberts live at Hornersville," replied her father, "but Odenried's our nearest neighbor. He's just here, across the privet. He is a bachelor, with plenty of money, some brains, and enough muscle to handle a sail, a gun, and a horse, or four of them, if you please, and bad ones into the bargain. You will have all the neighborhood calling, before you have been at home twenty-four hours, and then you can decide which of them you like best."

"And is there a Mrs. Mount Cuthbert?" continued the marquise, amiably bent upon conversation.

"She is the lady who was with those girls in the train," said John. "She is a fool!"

"Indeed? why that is quite promising!" said Bertha. "And Lollia, papa, how does she look now?"

"Lollia St. Clair is just the same, although she has grown a bit since you two used to play together. But bless me! haven't you two met abroad? They go every other season."

"No; it is very strange. When they came the first time to Paris, I was with Henri's *bonne-maman*, who was very ill at Bretauche, and I could not come up or have them down. The next time I was yachting with mamma, in the Greek archipelago; and so it has been. We have always missed each other. She intended to meet me in Paris, when she rushed through to Russia and Constantinople, but then, you know, they changed their plans, and came home by Japan and the Pacific. It seems quite wonderful we should never have seen each other since—since——"

"She is a handsome woman," said her

father. "The people here chatter of her, but I guess there is no harm in her. Some people's tongues will cavil at a woman simply because she is fine-looking; but this sin doesn't hang on very long, and Mrs. St. Clair is getting along."

"Take care, papa!" said Bertha, laughing, "she's only three years older than I am."

"I find you very youthful-looking, my dear," said her father. "But Mrs. St. Clair is still pretty. She is transparent enough. She is married to a prig."

Bertha wondered if her old friend was really transparent. So few women were. She remembered that a man who loved her hopelessly, and whom she had left disconsolate in France, had once told her that she, Bertha, was very "deep." She fell now to thinking of this man, and of those depths to which he had alluded. She looked out across the evening to the shores of a promontory which jutted out, and almost landlocked the bay to the

eastward; and the peace of the place and the hour seemed to stir those subtle depths. She had left her only son behind her, and she loved him dearly, but it was not of him she thought now, but of herself. She had not found in motherhood that engrossment which it is to some widowed women. It was a part of her being, but only a part. Memory tonight, which might so readily have bound and tangled her in its fetters, spoke less to her than a vague aspiration after something as yet untried and untasted, or at best imperfectly. One year of happiness is short to a character thirsting for penetrating and lasting experiences. Madame Le Moyne appreciated herself and her values. Why not, since others had done so? She sometimes felt that Destiny, which with her had opened so tragically, had, after all, only beckoned to her; between her and these beckonings her husband's grave had risen; and then, there was her little child.

A cloud came up and obscured the crescent that hung high up now in the heavens. Brackish pools of weedy water made little marshes in the salt grasses at her feet. A sea gull rose and screamed and sank in the wave, and still her eyes looked away from these, piercing the starry night with their questionings, as far as the faint, misty line where sky and water sank into one. "It is not possible," she thought, "that this is all!"

CHAPTER IV.

SHE liked the garden. It was not so large as those at Bretauche, which were wide and splendid and overlooked the Loire. And it was, of course, far less well kept; in fact, it was not kept at all, but this was its charm to her. She went there early the next morning, and concluded it would become her favorite haunt. She wandered all about the place. She stopped at the stables, and chatted with the men, who piloted her through rather disorderly intricacies, to view the horses. A groom, with his arm in a sling, conducted her and John across the barnyard, to take a peep at a new colt, son of a noted mare which was tied in a neighboring stall.

"And how did you hurt yourself?" asked Madame Le Moyne of the man.

"I was riding Victor around the bluff, to Mr. Mount Cuthbert's, ma'am, with a note I took for Mr. Breckinridge, on a Tuesday, and he got frighted at the boat that lay on the sand, and he just run agin the bank where lies the willow tree, and got me all tore and hurted. He's ugly in the saddle." Then John explained in his terse vocabulary that the note had been an invitation to dinner for the Mount Cuthberts, on the next Monday.

"Why, we are to be very dissipated!" said Madame Le Moyne. The thought of the dinner party sent her heart down into her little boots.

They stopped at the cottage, and here Bertha met old friends, Robert, the gardener, and his wife Ellen. Twenty years had touched them lightly, albeit the man was round-shouldered, and his head was bald and gray. Madame Le Moyne asked of the children. She remembered them, two little fat, freckled things, play-

ing at hide-and-seek in the orchard. "Our children is dead; and me and my wife is alone," said Robert, and Ellen looked grave; but it had all happened so long ago, the tears came less readily. They had been dear, but a great care and trouble. She had grown a little stolid; she was resigned, all was for the best. They had become a sentiment, they had ceased to be an affection, these dead children who slept side by side in the village cemetery. Madame Le Moyne remembered too late that she had been told by letter of their loss, and she pressed Ellen's hard hand in her own slender ones, and sighed. "How pretty the cottage looks," she said, trying to turn the subject. "Well," said Ellen, "there aint much joy with the little ones gone, but there's some comfort left, and for that God be praised."

How patiently humanity bears its sorrows! and for this it is commended. But it is those whose bleeding feet wander

with plaint and cry, seeking the sun, that shall see it. Such as fold their hands and accept darkness, satisfied, will not reach the height. "They do not seem to feel it much," thought Bertha, "and even I forget my sorrow. Ah! one wearies alike of sorrow and joy, of hope and pain!"

But this was but a mood, born of the homesickness which had been gnawing her. To be at home and devoured with homesickness, what a paradox! "I like the garden, and papa is good," she thought; "but I am lonely for Henri. I wonder what he does to-day."

That afternoon a lawyer came up from the city, and Henri's interests were duly discussed by word of mouth, and on paper, and signed and sealed and enveloped and corded. But there were things which could not be concluded in an hour, and Madame Le Moyne promised to stay at least a part of the summer with her father. "You will give me this

pleasure," he had said to her, and something in his rough voice touched her. It sounded like a note of entreaty. In very fact, Adrian found himself tremulously glad to have this lovely creature at the head of his table, glad and proud. He felt a desire to boast of her, and of his own prowess, to his neighbors and acquaintances, who had said his had been a wasted life. He was inclined to-day to forgive her the French husband and the little French son, and he even asked her some questions about his grandchild. She showed a picture set in pearls. It was a soft-haired, large-eyed baby; but now he was no longer a baby. She had left him at the *château*, with his tutor and his English governess, and his great-grandmother, who occupied all of one wing of the castle with her maids, and men servants, her parrot, and her pet *caniche*. The *caniche* was troublesome. Once a month he was purged, and three times every week he was washed and

combed, and decked with a fresh yellow ribbon.

The old marquise was eighty years old, but she had kept her brilliant eagle eye, and had hardly a gray hair; she was still very handsome. She sat all day near a wood fire, in her blue-and-gold salon, in a black lace cap with a black rose in it, and a black satin dress flounced to the waist. Here she had sat and mourned for her dead son, and her dead grandson brought home on a stretcher, mangled in the war. And here she had wept more in rage than sorrow when the abhorred Prussians had invaded her domains. And here her great-grandson sat at her knee, while she told him stories of his grandpapa's childhood. And here she received a few neighbors, a couple of old gentlemen of her generation, and her family physician, and the abbé from the parish town. She liked Bertha because she thought her *distinguée*, and also because she bore the

name. That was enough. The fact that she was American was bad, very bad, but what would you have? She had become a Catholic, which was well—a very poor Catholic, but still a Catholic. One could not expect everything. The *dot* had been excellent. The dowager marquise was a philosopher. And then Bertha had not tried too hard to please—always a fatal error. She had been contented to wait. She was one of those women, who through a certain balance of temperament, can do so. The effervescence of youth is apt to be too hot, too eager in these matters; Bertha was never eager. If the old lady had quarreled with her grandson's widow it would have been easy for the younger woman to oust her from her wing, and she liked the wing. She liked its stained-glass windows, its towers, its turrets, and the dark network of foliage that leaned across them. She liked the wing—which had been built in 1526—with its columns, whose friezes were traced in de-

signs at once ideal and tender; and in the niches of whose walls reposed the figures of marble gods and kings.

When we punish another person, it is wise to consider whether it will be he or we that shall suffer. The old marquise concluded to make a friend of Bertha. She was a woman of the world. In her part of the house, which was modernized and Parisianized, Bertha entertained company. The wing where the old lady sat remained mediæval, like her flounces and like the *bandeaux* of her glossy hair. The child was the one ray of progress that shot athwart its silent portals.

The arrival of the Marquise Le Moyne had been duly chronicled in the Hornersville *Gazette*, the New York papers had recorded it, and it had been telegraphed to Newport. From thence it had been wired all over the country, so that the cowboy on his Texan ranch, and the orange-grower on his Florida plantation,

had all read, within twenty-four hours, that this lady had reached Breckinridge House in safety, and would there pass the remainder of the summer. The day following, the papers throughout the country had announced that the lady was still young, a widow, elegant, handsome, and *chic*, and a shiver of interest ran through a continent.

To the immediate neighborhood staggering under its yearly efforts at summer gayeties—such as forced games of polo, on a hot field where there were not enough players to ride through a match; tea in the casino, which the women would not take the trouble to drive over and drink; dinner parties where there were not enough men to go round; musicales with the music left out, and dances where the girls had to waltz together—it is no wonder that the advent of a new figure caused a ripple of delectable excitement.

The Misses Horner called first, but Madame Le Moyne was out driving.

This was bitter, but had to be accepted as part of that untoward fate with which some malevolent deity had always frowned upon these ladies' social efforts. But the Misses Larned, who were younger and wiser, had timed their visit to the modern key. Dropping in about five o'clock, they found the newly-arrived having a cup of tea on the veranda. Their approach was heralded by a series of shrill giggles, with a variation of muffled sounds, through which the words, "Now stop, Clara! don't! How silly!" were more or less distinctly audible. They emerged from the house helter-skelter. Their hostess rose to greet them. "Did you come to see me? I am very much charmed," she said in her pretty voice, with its upward inflections. "Pray sit near me, and we will have some tea together."

"Isn't it lovely here!" said Clara.

"It must seem strange to you," said Mary.

"How silly you are!" said Clara, giggling.

"Well, I don't see anything silly," said Mary, frowning.

"I have, in fact, only just arrived."

"Have any of the people called, Mrs.—Madame Le Moyne?" said Clara, who was evidently the elder of the sisters, and took the initiative.

"The Misses Horner, I think, were the first," said Madame Le Moyne. "They were old friends of my mother's." This was a signal for a fresh outburst. "Aren't they terrible old frumps?" said Clara.

"O Clara!" said Mary.

"I think I saw them in the train," said Madame Le Moyne. "They were certainly not beautiful, the poor ladies."

"They must be a hundred," said Clara.

"How rude, Clara, when Madame Le Moyne—and that's nonsense. Miss Maria is not an old woman at all."

"Oh, well, Miss Jane must have been a good deal older than Madame Le Moyne's

mother," said Clara, with a flush and another titter.

"We must all pass through that," said Madame Le Moyne. "Old age is sad, but let us hope that it will have its compensations. I have an old lady at home, and she is so clever and so wise! But then I always think age in France is met with a peculiar grace. This one is a very great lady, a type which the French cads who write the brilliant novels of to-day fail to portray. They write wonderfully, of course, about men and women and animals, but they cannot portray ladies and gentlemen. How could they, indeed, since they never meet them? Feuillet alone had imagination enough, as well as experience, to delineate these delicate silhouettes."

The girls listened in entranced silence.

"You have a grand place over there, haven't you?" said Clara.

"Yes, Bretauche, on the Loire, is nice. In fact it is very fine. Then there is a

smaller domain, near to us, which will be my little boy's when he comes of age."

"And do you go to Paris every winter?"

"Yes, of course, when the opera begins, and the gayeties, I go in for a short season."

"We have been over a number of times," said Clara, "but we didn't meet any French people."

"We did meet one man once, the Comte de Breuil. Do you know him, Madame Le Moyne, and is he—er—all right?" Here Mary laughed, and choked so that she had to put down her cup.

"I always told you he was a hairdresser," said Clara, at which Mary shook her head, and murmured, "Will you be still?" Madame Le Moyne had not met the Comte de Breuil.

"Have you seen Mrs. Mount Cuthbert yet?" turning the subject abruptly.

"No, I have not had that pleasure," said Madame Le Moyne.

"Well, you will, then, for she's dying to see you, and I think she's coming this afternoon. She's no end of a lark; she gets up everything. I don't know what we'd do without her, although she's so awfully delicate."

"Bah! it's all imagination. She's as tough as she can be, and can do more in one day than any man." Madame Le Moyne politely murmured that she should hope to meet this paradoxical person.

"And Mrs. St. Clair," said Clara, "has she been over? She's awfully handsome."

"I don't see how you can say so," said Mary; "she's not nearly as pretty as Mrs. Mount Cuthbert. The distance between her eyebrows is too pronounced, then her mouth is very bad——"

"Mary is jealous," said Clara, "revengefully jealous."

"Clara, how absurd!" More giggling.

"Yes, she is jealous because a certain

gentleman she admires pays more attention to Mrs. St. Clair than to her, or to any of the rest of us."

"Clara!"

"And who is he?" said Madame Le Moyne, "that is considered so desirable?"

"Mr. Odenried."

"Ah, I have heard my father and brother speak of him. Is he very agreeable?"

Madame Le Moyne was profoundly bored, nay, she thought these girls insufferable, but she had concluded to be civil.

"He is fascinating!" said the girls in one breath.

"A *coq de village*, no doubt," thought the marquise contemptuously, but she only said, "Ah! what is the ideal of a fascinating man that this paragon fills?"

"You must see him for yourself; he is everything, he is just lovely!" After this there was another shrill access of

quickly suppressed merriment. "Clara, have done!"

"He's tall and handsome and immensely clever, and swims and rides and does everything well, and all the girls are wild about him here, and the married women too, for the matter of that, but——"

"But he is always with Mrs. St. Clair."

"He has good taste, then," said Madame Le Moyne, smiling, "has he not?"

"She is very exclusive, in a way."

"We played together when we were children."

"You look ever so much younger, Madame Le Moyne," said Clara.

"I am younger, but not by many years. I am getting an old woman."

"Oh," said the girls in unison, "fancy your saying that! we think you just perfect."

"Mrs. Mount Cuthbert," announced Almeric. The newcomer hopped to the veranda like a tame sparrow from its

perch. "I am so glad to meet you," she said, extending a small, tightly gloved hand. She was a short, stoutish, fair person, with a piquant profile, and a profusion of spun-silk light hair. There was a tradition, however, among her friends—such dutiful ones as keep these records—that her hair had once been ten shades darker, and had gone through a great variety of vicissitudes. Persons watched it now with keen anxiety, speculating as to those seams and fissures, through which one got, as it were, reflections of iridescent brown tones. There was one individual who had never remarked these changes with suspicion, and that was Mr. Mount Cuthbert himself. Husbands belong, as a class, to the category of those beings mentioned in Scripture who having eyes see not, and having noses smell not.

Upon Mrs. Mount Cuthbert's advent the Larned young women fluttered un-

easily for a moment, flapped their feathers, and then turned to take wing.

"Those girls are terribly noisy. Don't yon find them so, Madame Le Moyne?" said her visitor in a confidential tone, settling herself in a chair, which was so deep that, when she leaned back, her plump feet could not reach the flooring of the piazza.

"Yes—rather." Madame Le Moyne smiled faintly.

"They jar terribly on my nerves, but then I am an invalid. I will admit to you my nerves are in a deplorable condition." Madame Le Moynè expressed sympathy.

"You may pity me. I am an exemplification of the triumph of mind over matter." Matter seemed to be not entirely in abeyance, but Madame Le Moyne did not say so, and only looked up interrogatively.

"Yes, my physician assures me that it is only by the extremest prudence I can

hope to prolong life at all." Madame Le Moyne's gray-green pupils distended with surprise.

"You will tell me that I look well, but this—er—slight *embonpoint* is, in fact, only a dropsical development, a tendency to puffiness, too much water in the wrong channels."

"Dear me!" said Madame Le Moyne.

"At one time it was on my lungs—the water, I mean; I went to some baths to scatter it—it is scattered—to the cost of my figure." Madame Le Moyne politely assured her visitor that her figure was admirable.

"Ah—well, possibly—when one knows all that I have to contend against, it is wonderful that I look even decently. Madame Le Moyne, you see before you a woman that has eighteen vital organs seriously attacked!"

"Eighteen!" Madame Le Moyne raised her hands in horrified protest. "Why, I didn't know we had so many!"

"Neither did I," said Mrs. Mount Cuthbert gloomily, "until I had investigated. But it's wonderful, after a thorough diagnosis, how these things come to light. You see before you a person suffering from eighteen mortal and chronic disorders. The day may come when you will not be exempt yourself, Madame Le Moyne; but the raw meat diet, with sterilized milk, between meals—a regimen I have lately tested—you will find efficacious—at least in alleviating suffering."

"Thanks, my appetite is excellent. One can hardly believe you to be such a sufferer. The lines of your face indicate no such symptoms. Why, you are the picture of rosy health!"

"Really?" Mrs. Mount Cuthbert smiled, disclosing a row of pearly teeth, which looked as regular as new beads of grain in a fresh sheaf. "Yet you have no idea how difficult I find it to keep up. I do so for—for—my husband's sake.

He is as strong as a horse, and terribly exacting. He has no conception of the necessities of a delicate and highly strung organization like mine. But I shall die in harness. That is my motto—die in harness."

"It is as well," ejaculated the marquise.

"And you, Madame Le Moyne," she continued plaintively, "are you in fair health?"

"I am strong, thanks, and quite sound," said the marquise, laughing lightly. She thought Mrs. Mount Cuthbert very entertaining.

"You have children, I believe?"

"One little son. He is with Madame Le Moyne, his great-grandmamma."

"Ah—fancy!—you live in the Department of——"

"Indre-Loire. At Bretauche. Our home is on the river."

"And how do you like America?"

"I have only been here two days, you know."

"And I can see, you are already pining for your dear France."

"Oh, not at all. I have been separated by circumstances from my father and brother many years; it is not only a duty, but a pleasure, for me to pass this summer with them."

"Your brother is very unsocial," said Mrs. Mount Cuthbert. "I shall make you persuade him to join the polo club. We are sadly in want of men."

"Ah, that is the case in all *campagnes* which are not watering places. It is the same at the *château.* We have to get the men up from Paris, or from far-off places in the provinces, if we want a dance. But I am afraid my brother John is a recluse, and too old to change."

"And do you dance often?"

"At the *château*, do you mean? Yes; when we have house parties."

"I am fond of dancing and of all exercises, swimming, riding, skating." This seemed inconsequent for a dying woman;

but Madame Le Moyne had been long in a country where ready tact is in the air. She made no comment.

"Yes, in the autumn I positively live in the saddle. Sometimes I ride with Mrs. St. Clair and Mr. Odenried and others."

"Ah, he is the gentleman the demoiselles Larned think so fascinating!" Mrs. Mount Cuthbert pushed her chair closer to Madame Le Moyne's elbow, and lowered her voice. "What did they tell you about him?" she asked.

"That he was extraordinarily nice, and a woman-eater."

"Pshaw! Well, he is nice—rather—but——"

"What else?"

"Nothing. You haven't met him, then?"

"No; I shall survive if I never do. I am prejudiced already. I hate men *à bonnes aventures.* I thought that class did not exist in America." "They are

crazy with their village swain," she thought.

"Wait till you know him; perhaps you will change your mind, although *I* am not one of his admirers."

"That is not in my character; to change my mind. I am obstinate."

"And you look so graceful and supple."

"Do I?"

"Yet I think, though pliant, you might be decided."

"She is not the fool my brother thinks her," passed through Madame Le Moyne's brain. "Decided? What makes you imagine it?"

"I don't know. You are so quiet, so reposeful; but you give one the impression of still waters. And now, dear lady, I must be going. Do drop in any day at five o'clock. Thursdays we have polo. You must be sure to come and see the players the next time. Now, don't fail us. Everybody is wild to catch a

glimpse of you. We are all agog, you know, about you. You are the *rara avis* of the hour. Ugh! Oh, my! Oh, mercy!"

"What has happened?" asked Madame Le Moyne, alarmed. For Mrs. Mount Cuthbert had given a sudden wriggle and a stifled scream. Could it be a wasp, a mouse?

"Oh, don't be frightened. It's only my porous adhesive, my dear, that scraped the apex of my spine. Did you ever try one of those plasters?"

"Never," said the marquise, with conviction.

"Well, let me recommend one at once. Your maid heats it before the fire; you lie down, and then—it is clapped on, and there it stays—months!"

"Heavens!" said the marquise.

"The best way will be for me to send you some. This place looks damp to me. You will probably have the rheumatism. You should get your papa to fell the

trees. Trees are a danger. I had the malaria in every joint. It was like a pain in my blood. So one day, when my husband was away, I cut down every tree on the place. He was very angry when he got back. Men are so shockingly selfish, you know. He had no pain in—his blood."

"But I have nothing the matter with my spine," said the marquise, becoming a trifle irritated, "or with my blood."

"Well, my dear, you probably will have before you ever can turn round. An ounce of preventive is worth a pound of cure. That is what I am always saying to Mount Cuthbert. I will give you the exact directions, and a box of them into the bargain. It will save you sending into town. And now I must run off. I hear a carriage coming around the drive. Here are more visitors. Good-by!" And she backed out with a movement engendered no doubt by the desire of not disturbing her—plaster. She bumped up

against a lady and gentleman, while Almeric announced in a strident voice, "Mrs. St. Clair and Mr. Cranston."

"Dearest, dearest Bertha!" said Mrs. St. Clair. She took the marquise into her arms.

CHAPTER V.

LOLLIA ST. CLAIR and Bertha Le Moyne looked at each other across the memories of twenty years. The gulf of time which had severed them had held a *motif* whose strain was not a gay one. Yet the two young women were young women still, and they were fair to look upon. Bertha's childhood, indeed, had held no great promise of beauty, although she had been born graceful and elegant. Even now there were those who failed to acknowledge in her the existence of the fatal gift. Mrs. St. Clair's claims would have commanded more instantaneous and general recognition, while they would never have stirred in individual instances such a quantum of enthusiasm. She was thirty-five, and looked fully her age; a woman in the plentitude of her powers, a

blown flower erect on its stem, from which no petals had yet been roughly shaken. She had dark hair, a broad forehead, and a pair of black eyes from which shot somber blue gleams. Her complexion was a pure olive, with a dark color in the cheek. Her mouth, which was the least good of her features, was wide and somewhat coarse in outline, with pale, nervous lips which betrayed every emotion of a face whose dominant expression was one of dissatisfaction, anxiety, and restlessness. The superficial—these conscientious critics —saw in her physiognomy, however, only evidences of daring and of audacity. In person Mrs. St. Clair was imposing. She was large, tall, and inclined to a stoutness against which she waged a valiant and unceasing warfare. Her hips and bust were salient. She was tightly laced to-day, into a very becoming gown of some rich scarlet material, set off with soft white laces. Over her head she carried a parasol of the same bright hue, with a curi-

ous Oriental handle of gold-and-silver workmanship. Every detail of her toilet showed the woman who dresses with an object. Her gloves, her shoes, her stockings were perfect. One wondered, with her, if it might not be the heart, as well as the head, which had dictated the choice of so charming an outfit.

Her companion, an elderly, rubicund gentleman, was also attired in the height of fashion. He dangled a cane, and his buttonhole was ornamented by the dewy waxiness of a white gardenia. He wore a sailor hat, and a light-blue necktie decked the front of his striped shirt. Mrs. St. Clair presented him to Madame Le Moyne as a guest who had driven over with her from her place Kilcairn, a good eight miles.

"Mr. Cranston," she said, "came up yesterday in the *Lark*. He insisted that his yachting costume was indecorous for visiting, but I carried him off as he was, and so you have him *en matelot*."

Not having seen each other for the

half of a lifetime, and having a hundred, nay, a thousand important things to say to each other, they naturally fell to talking of the weather, and of the sailing in the neighboring waters. The commonplace is the salve of embarrassment. Madame Le Moyne turned to ask Mr. Cranston some questions about sailing-boats. She had been to the edge of the mere, and had been watching their evolutions with curiosity and interest. In so doing she drew upon herself a flood of technicalities which dismayed her. He told her nothing could be simpler. "To get the spanker boom, trysail, mast, and gaff on board, one must use the yard and stay-tackle," said this voluble gentleman, "put the hooks on the trysail, mast and stop them. Sway away by a pendant tackle, and point the mast through the after chock of the trestle-trees. Lash its head to the mizzen masthead. Leather the boom in the wake of the crotch. Seize on sheet-blocks and reef the sheets, bar

the boom, etc., etc. Hock the topping lift. Seize on a cleat to belay the out-haulers; then leather the jaws of the gaff, fit throat, and peak halliards——"

He stopped to take a breath. "Perhaps it would be better," he said, "that I should give you a practical lesson in sailing a ship. Nothing can be more simple; nothing. We will have a breakfast on the *Lark!*"

"*Mon Dieu!* it must, indeed, be very simple," ejaculated the marquise.

"I think, Mr. Cranston," said Mrs. St. Clair, "you desired to speak with Mr. Breckinridge. I see him over there in the meadow, talking to the haymakers," she raised her long arm; "yes, there he is. Go down and join him, there's a dear, for Madame Le Moyne and I are dying for a *tête-à-tête.*" Thus admonished, Mr. Cranston got up and ambled away. Both ladies laughed. The mutual laugh cleared the atmosphere of the years. "Such an old bore!" said Mrs. St. Clair, "but

amiable, and generous with his money. Sometimes I think he isn't quite right in the upper story, but he is perfectly harmless." Then the two ladies stepped off the veranda, and wandered away to the garden together.

"O Bertha, do you remember the day you fell out of the swing?"

"O Lollia, do you remember the day we went to old Farmer Green's pigsty?"

"Do I not! And now Farmer Green is dead, and the place is Mr. Odenried's."

"And he is a great friend of yours."

"Who, Mr. Odenried? I hope so. Why do you ask?" Notwithstanding her indifferent manner, a crimson flush had suffused Mrs. St. Clair's throat. Madame Le Moyne was too well-bred to notice it.

"I do not ask. I state the fact which was told me the day I arrived. The only desirable man of the neighborhood, I was informed, was your humble slave and vassal. I felt quite discouraged."

"This is a hotbed of gossip, as you will find to your vexation."

"Do they gossip here? what about, pray?"

"Why, of course, everywhere one finds the same types. This is but an insect world—there is the bee that makes the honey and the wasp that stings; the ugly worm which sucks the leaf juices, the fussy cricket that buzzes, the little grasshopper that eats the clover and nips one's feet as one passes. They will gossip about you next."

"Why, whatever could be discovered to say of me, a stranger, here to-day, gone to-morrow?"

"Do you really leave us soon? And I did so hail your coming, for I have no friend here. The people are provincial, narrow, stupid, and you——"

"And I?"

"Ah, I have seen, read already what you are!"

"And that is?"

"A woman, dear, and not a doll-baby."

"I have had enough to evoke the woman, to sober me."

"Dear Bertha! and yet you look so girlish. There must be something of the goddess in you. A touch of immortality, since time leaves no traces upon you. Yes, you have still that *Diane Chasseresse* look I remember in your childhood. They should have named you Artemis. One always looked for a quiver between your shoulders, and a crescent in your brown hair."

"Is it Mr. Odenried who teaches you such poetic words?" Then not waiting for her friend's answer, "And how handsome and dashing you are grown, Lollia!"

Lollia's face lightened with pleasure.

"Really? I felt that I was hideous today. I have quarreled with a friend; it is not becoming!"

"Make up, then. No man is worth jeopardizing one's looks for."

"How do you know it's a man?"

"I think I could even guess his name."

"What nonsense!"

"Do you advise a reconciliation?"

"Undoubtedly, if the misunderstanding affects spirits, health, and beauty."

"What a Socrates you are! Your life has seemed a romance to me, Bertha—a poem; has it made you wise as well?"

"No."

"You will find us here very uninteresting. Later you will go to Newport, and there you will see a quite different life, a life which I confess appeals to my frivolous side. Some people think it is the only side I possess."

"But you know better?" said Bertha interrogatively.

"I know better. . . . to my cost," said Mrs. St. Clair, with sudden gravity. Then Madame Le Moyne asked her a very direct question, which was a habit of this lady's, although she could be discreet

when it suited her purposes. "Are you not happy, Lollia?"

"Ah, what is happiness!"

"The assurance of to-morrow, I sometimes think."

"Then I am emphatically not happy. But I am not sure that I could not forego to-morrow if I were quite certain even of to-day."

"Is it rest you crave, Lollia, and have you it not?"

"Rest would kill me; I could not rest!"

"Ah, how I understand you! One grows so weary of tablelands! One longs to soar and mount. Perhaps for one high flight, Lollia, one should be willing to pay the penalty of downfall."

"Ah, I don't know. The higher the flight, the more terrible the fall."

"I hope that you are not offended at my question."

"I like your question; it is a relief; a relief from being told that the Wycliffe

cottage is rented to a Cincinnati pork-packer, that Miss Maria Horner's pet cat was run over by Mr. Larned's mail phaeton; and that the nihilist Roudin will lecture in Mrs. Mount Cuthbert's summer drawing room, at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning——"

"A nihilist here, in this abode of peace!"

"Yes, and you know if yours in France are snarling dogs, the Russians are biting wolves, and when they get here they are quite too cross and terrible."

"You were in Russia?"

"Yes, as a traveler and sight-seer, no more. Have you read them much?"

"I have read them, as you express it, with fury, fervor, faith; as you and I used to read 'Lillian's Golden Hours'—do you remember, Lollia?—behind the red bath house, with old Jane shouting for us across the lawn, and the supper gong resounding all the way to Coon's Glen? I almost deplore my way of reading, and

envy the people who skim to find diversion only, and glean rapid if ephemeral impressions, just as they would glance at a gem in its case exposed in a shop-window. Reading, to me, Lollia, has been food for the soul. For several years after—after—you know, during my mourning—I did little else. I wanted not only distraction, but direction, guidance. I asked it everywhere, anywhere. I wanted a reason for living. I only became critical afterward, as one does of the cooking when one's first hunger-pangs are assuaged."

"How few read with this agony! You must have become a good critic. How few know anything of criticism. What do the careless ones fathom of form? of style? of thought? But I fear I, too, am one of those who read more to drug thought than to instruct it." But Bertha did not ask her again the secret of her unrest.

With this desultory talk they had

reached the end of the walk at the foot of the terrace, where slept the pond near which they had played as children. How often it had reflected their young shadows, holding them lovingly, as it did the little white clouds of the sky. Had it retained some vestige of the hopes, the fears, the joys of their lost childhood? Its waters were more stagnant than formerly, less clear. As the young women looked down together into its dark surface, a certain sadness crept over them. What did they see reflected there besides their own faces?

"I hope," said Lollia, turning to her friend with a sigh, "you will let me come over often, Bertha. I am drawn to you."

"Yes," said the marquise, "it is the same with me. I am lonely here, I need you. Papa is so kind, and my brother, it touches my heart. But you would interest my mind and give me ideas; it is *triste* here."

"Are you fretting for your child?"

"No, not always, not often—sometimes. At night I long for his little arms, they are so loving. But I could not take him from his *bonne-maman.* I think it would have killed her. She is alone of all her family, and very old. He is the last note of melody her life will ever hold. I dare not silence it!"

"You are good."

"Good? How can I tell? My 'goodness' may be all ignorance."

"You don't look, Bertha, like a woman who has not felt."

"Ah, I have felt! Yet I think there may be emotions which are as yet unsounded."

"What kind of emotions?" said Lollia eagerly.

"Oh, no matter. Here come our gentlemen."

"I will wager Cranston is still on his spanker boom top-lifts. Ah, Mr. Breckinridge!"

The host came up and greeted Mrs. St. Clair with courtesy. He had never entirely lost his manners, which had, in his youth, been polished. He was heavy and hot, carelessly dressed, panting from his hurried walk, but he was still the gentleman. He looked from her to his daughter, and there was a kindly light in his eyes. This fair stranger was humanizing him, him and John. They always dressed themselves for dinner now. They had abjured their toddy at their meals. If it was partaken of at all it was in the privacy of their chambers, where sleep should come swiftly and carry off its fumes from heavy eyelids.

Every evening they sat out with her in the moonlight, or under the stars. Disillusioned in heart, cramped in intellect, Adrian Breckinridge's thought was still capable of certain echoes of sentiment. Disappointed at every turn, he had become dumbly defiant, but now, under the breath of this new sweet pres-

ence, the currents of his being, long repressed and frozen, moved within him. They stirred him from his inertia and lassitude into a desire that Bertha, at least, should be contented. It may have been something in Madame Le Moyne herself which inspired in others a desire to please her. There was a curl of her lip which showed that she might be mocking. There are persons whose opinion of us we unconsciously fear. We find ourselves, in spite of feigned indifference, anxiously expectant of their verdicts. Adrian knew that his daughter might have been taught to hate him, and his pride, as well as his heart, suffered; but he had always duped himself more than others, and in this he did his dead wife injustice. In this thing she had not been petty. She had herself been harsh, but she had not tried to destroy any lingering filial affection the girl might entertain for the father she never saw. To destroy is sometimes to

create. Lukewarmness had engendered lukewarmness. Bertha might possibly have thought of her father oftener had she heard him oftener attacked. She had loved him as much as she could; it may be said that it was very little. She had by nature a strong sense of duty; she had decided to be dutiful. She had always written to him.

"Ah, Mr. Breckinridge," cried Mrs. St. Clair, "here you are to remind me of the dinner party. We are all on tiptoe at the thought of such an unusual dissipation."

"Yes, dear lady, and when you come Fanny's litter will be in condition for me to present you with the finest pup that ever was born on our upper farm, in commemoration of your kindness."

"What, one of Fan's pups for me? How shall I ever thank you?"

"By feeding it on dry biscuit and bun rusk, and letting me enter it for you, as from the Breckinridge kennels, at the bench show next November."

"You are an angel!"

"I hope, mesdames," said Mr. Cranston, "you will let me bring the *Lark* around, some fine afternoon, and offer luncheon or a cup of tea on board. She'd have room to lay off, she'd have her mooring swivel on, she——"

"Yes, yes, if you please, I will like to go," said Bertha.

"I once tried to run her in here, in a high wind and sea. We struck on the bar, we had to lower the boats. Stern on is the safest, yet we took in waves. You see the strongest, highest part of the boat must be presented. Rudder and oars will do the rest. Bless me, there's the disadvantage of lowness of stern, which makes pooping more likely than taking water; protracted exposure to the waves, for you must go along with them—and a tendency to gripe——"

"Good-by!" cut short Mrs. St. Clair, adding a whisper to Bertha: "Don't you think we pay dearly for the yacht?

Good-by, and remember your promise to see me often." Mr. Cranston brought his toes in line, and gave a flourish of his hat, as the low victoria, which was drawn up under the trees, was hailed, and drove rapidly around by the piazza steps, with a sharp, rasping sound on the white gravel. With a wave of the hand they drove away. And Fortune chuckled in her sleeve at what was done, and at the puppets who were, this golden summer, to dance like motes in the sun, for her pleasuring.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. ST. CLAIR did not pay much attention to Mr. Cranston during the homeward drive. He continued to talk in his wooden way, with his wooden, foolish, teasing smile, but she answered him in monosyllables. Her reflections were absorbing and profound. Some of them were for Bertha, but not all, for her brain was occupied by a fixed idea, which never gave her time. No matter how large the heart's hostelry may be, when it is full it has but poor accommodations for transient comers. There is, however, a desire for sympathy which walks hand in hand with certain dispositions of the mind; and Mrs. St. Clair realized vaguely that the thirst which she had long felt for this sweet aliment was to be assuaged in this new

companionship. "I believe she could understand," she said half aloud.

"Eh, what?" asked Mr. Cranston, killing a mosquito which had alighted on his chin.

"I did not speak," said Mrs. St. Clair.

"Oh, beg pardon, I thought——"

"What did you think?" she now asked, shaking off dreams.

"She is ladylike," said Mr. Cranston.

"Oh!" said Mrs. St. Clair.

"Why do you say—Oh?"

"Because I want to." Mr. Cranston stared, unsmiling now, and they relapsed into silence. He liked Mrs. St. Clair because she was "smart," and looked well on his yacht, but she always made him a little uncomfortable. He was fond of law and order. She did not quite fit into his desirable conceptions of these fixed entities.

When she reached her house she sprang from her phaeton almost before the spirited horses had been reined in.

Mr. Cranston preferred not to stop then. He would be driven to the dock to give some orders to his captain, and would return to the eight o'clock dinner.

"By by, then," said Lollia, shading her eyes with one hand and waving her parasol to him with the other. She seemed, the instant she entered the wide doors of her domain, to fill it with her strong personality. She swept together some notes and letters which lay on the carved oak table in the vestibule, and then, with a vigorous step, began to mount the stairs. On the landing above, watching her, stood her step-daughter, a little girl of about eleven years. She had been but three when her papa had married again. How often he had asked himself since why he had done it! It had been a moment's dementia, whose fruits had been bitter enough.

Milly St. Clair's had been one of those turbulent spirits which cannot wait the allotted time to lay its claims to life.

She had burst through its portals too early, with the guilt of her poor young mother's death upon her, and it really had been hardly worth while. To a creature so frail and fretful existence would have come all too soon. Perhaps if she had waited a little longer, however, she would not have found such an appalled and discouraged welcome.

At this early date of her career her head was found to be unnaturally large, and her legs unnaturally thin. She was a shriveled, dried-up looking little creature, who cried half of the day and quite all of the night. She was wrapped in cotton batting and put into a sort of incubator, from which she emerged about the time she ought to have been born, with a still larger head, and still thinner limbs, but very much alive and crying still. At sixteen months she was running about without a hair on her head, or a tooth to boast of; and her hair and teeth had only commenced to assert their retarded

growths when her father had begun to woo her second mamma.

When the high-spirited Lollia, burning with life and strength, first saw her new daughter, it must be confessed her heart sank. Possibly the husband of the dead woman—inconsolable, although thus faithless—saw the dismay written upon her telltale countenance. If he saw it he did not forgive it. His was an unforgiving nature. He had loved his first wife deeply, as narrow people can love, and he adored her child. He intended to give her a mother who should also adore. Lollia early explained to him that this was not possible. She was frank; it is generally a mistake. With persons of George St. Clair's fiber it is always so. Certainly Milly was not adorable. Whatever special graces may have been hers to command her father's heart, to others she was eminently repellent.

Lollia had waited to marry until she was twenty-five, because she had had no

leisure before to think of anything so serious. She had lived for pleasure, piloted through the world by a pleasure-loving mother. She had yielded at last to this mother's entreaties, without too many grimaces, that she should accept this admirable suitor and his still more admirable fortune.

Milly, however, was found to be not only repellent, but the most inconvenient of little marplots. Two hours before the first house-party had been bidden to Kilcairn, by the newly-made bride, she had declared—the smallpox. The guests had to be met at the station with the interesting announcement. How many poxes she had had since then! She gave the whooping cough to the baby of the Misses Horners' cousin, young Mrs. Sargent, who was visiting them, and the baby died, although Milly got well. When Mrs. St. Clair gave an opera party to the daughter of the President of the United States, Milly was taken with a screaming fit.

Her yells rent the air; and although the carriages were all at the door, and the people assembled, Mrs. St. Clair had to send them on alone, and to remain with the child for an hour. She proved to be feverish, and refused to go to sleep unless she might hold Lollia's hand. Lollia gave her jeweled fingers into the hot palm of the little invalid, and sat by the bed, while she heard, one by one, the carriages drive away. She gave her fingers and she was kind, and even gentle, but she was agitated by a whirl of impotent, impatient revolt; and the husband, as he watched her, made note of the revolt and impatience, not of the effort at gentleness and kindness. He was in mourning for a relative, and was not going to the opera himself. The instant that the tossing head had become quiet, and the eager, furtive eyes of the child had closed, Lollia had made her escape hurriedly, not looking back, not once, not lingering even to give a parting injunction, and, as I say,

her husband had seen it, and had pondered over it as her brougham rolled away.

And so it had been always. She had kicked against the pricks till she was sore, but it had all been done in the dark. She had no light. How could a bringing-up of frivolity and self-indulgence have schooled her for the needed sacrifice? She could bite her lip and restrain her anger. So far she conquered; but she could not quell her heart-beats or her soul-throbs, and for these, which he dimly guessed, her husband blamed her.

Milly had not been slow to learn that there was a certain tyranny she could exert over this grand, impetuous step-mother, and she was not only keen to detect, but quick to enforce her power. Brought from death into life, nursed, petted, caressed, she was a despot and an autocrat. She had been humored where she should have been controlled—force, not cajolery, must govern the hysterical—

and she was a very disagreeable little girl indeed; her very ailments were always of a kind that disfigure, humiliate, and inconvenience, but do not imperil or kill, and hence seem to lack the elements of pathos and of tragedy.

After the first years Lollia, finding herself never encouraged, relaxed her own rules of conduct. Large wealth makes possible separate aims and distinct purposes in the family. She and her step-daughter were now little together. The child had nurses, governesses, tutors, and companions, and the two were drifting further and further apart. Yet the distance was perhaps not as wide as they either of them imagined. Milly passionately admired her step-mother, if she did not love her. She looked upon her with a sort of curious wonderment, and Mrs. St. Clair was not without a certain self-reproachful affection for the girl. There was a much wider breach in the household than this one, more insidious, one

that nothing should ever bridge; and this was between the husband and the wife. They were outwardly courteous to each other, but their intercourse ended there. Why? Who can tell? Not I, who knew them but little. Not the world, who knew them not at all. I have always felt that the fault was as much George St. Clair's as his high-spirited wife's. He married one woman when his heart was in another's grave, and he chose one utterly unfit for the path he had in his egotism mapped out for her. At first she had frantically rebelled, and there had been quarrels. Now that there was absolute estrangement, there was an armistice and an outward calm. In certain aspects she suited him. She was high-bred, sitting at his table. She looked well in her carriage. He was methodical, and she liked method, in her household at least, if her mind was chaotic. She was an elegant woman, and although there was something

dashing about her which he deprecated, and tried to crush out, he had learned to hope she would not disgrace him. More and more he shut himself away from her, spending half of his days alone, in his study. What he did in this study it would have been difficult to say. He read his newspapers. he wrote a few short letters, he looked over his accounts, he interviewed the gardener, he brooded over his wrongs, and he occasionally read Trollope's novels. These failing him, he would con one of those meteoric, inane productions which *littérateurs* laugh at, serious men decry, and yet which sweep a country with their two hundred thousands in spite of protest, cavil, and ridicule ; sweep a country from sea to sea, leaving no more trace behind them than the sirocco of the desert, than the criminal dropped to his doom in the *oubliette.* He thought himself something of a critic.

He had a pompous manner, an impos-

ing front, a strong voice which carried weight with the uninitiated. His wife, however, had gauged the impotence of his mind during the period of her very short honeymoon. Since then she had often inwardly blushed for his mental incapacity, and had been aghast and surprised to find that on the whole people looked up to him, and that there were those who said he was clever. He certainly did nothing to shock the world. He was scrupulously fair in all his dealings with it, owed no man anything, attended church regularly of a Sunday morning, and cared for his delicate daughter. An excellent man. He had known but one impulse in his life, and that had been his second marriage. It had effectually cured him of impulses. Lollia thought him a man of stone.

He knew that he did not make his wife happy, but he told himself that it was her fault, that hers was a shallow and frivolous nature, and that all the trouble lay at her door. Once, when he had accused

her of coldness, of a lack of tenderness, she had replied, "It is my temperament," and at the time she had believed this. There are limitations of sense and of emotion of which we should never accuse another. To accuse of, is to fix them. Mr. St. Clair was not a man of tact, nor can it be said that Lollia was possessed of this very desirable quality. If his methods were earnest, they were blundering. She had no methods. Early in their married lives they had formed the habit of telling each other unpleasant truths.

Mr. St. Clair sometimes informed his wife that her flippant course was unbecoming a woman of her years. It is to be feared her reply to this thrust was not always tempered by discretion. Often they wounded each other through stupidity—through want of mental sympathy. But this was more often Mr. St. Clair.

And here would it be out of place to say a word about tact? How shall we

give an adequate definition of that subtlest, most intangible, and most alluring of qualities, which is at once touch, feeling, nice perception, and discernment? Tact is not a scentless wild flower of a single leaf, born of a sun-ray, nurtured by a shower, but a rare, rich, and difficult exotic, precious in perfume, delicate in color; to be shielded, prized, cultivated. It can flourish only where its dainty seed has found a soil which suits its gracious growing.

That it is a combination of reflection and inspiration none will gainsay; but its illuminations do not always guide the thoughtful, or find room in an ardent imagination, nor can we insist that it springs from the heart, for there are kindly and loving natures which are yet incapable of this joy-inspiring grace. It is probable that there is a narrow, morbid form of egotism, which is unable to picture to itself any sentiment, emotion, or experience which has not been its own.

The impossibility of putting one's self in another's place is an insurmountable barrier to consideration for others' feelings. It is probably a sure detriment to the acquisition of fine perceptions. The Latin is generally conceded to possess tact, born of a natural suppleness and adaptiveness of mind, in a far higher degree than the stiff, unswerving Anglo-Saxon. The Anglo-Saxon prefers to preserve the sincerity of his opinions and of his expressions than to make those concessions which please and soothe. It is probable that the aggressive character—which is not without its uses, and which is so constantly met with in Great Britain—is inherently devoid of any high degree of the quality. There is a measure of affectionateness, gentleness, and tenderness, which is undoubtedly incompatible with a perfect sincerity, or at least with that brutal form of sincerity which some muscular persons advocate. Bone and sinew are, no doubt, admirable, and should be

judiciously developed by diet and exercise. When, however, these weapons are used in a sudden and rude contact with our inoffensive craniums, they cease, to us at least, to appear desirable.

It is probable that to explain what is not tact is a far lighter task than to set forth what it is. A French lady of rank was once handed a note from a compatriot of my own, and perused it in my presence. She put it down with the comment, "You are, no doubt, a very great people, but you are not amiable." It may be said that the French word *aimable* is hardly translatable. The note, which she showed me afterward, was intended to be courteous; this I saw at once with my less exacting Saxon instincts. But in the estimation of the highly civilized Parisian it was curt and impolite. There had been an obtuseness on the part of the writer, in not more fully gauging what would be this lady's demands; although this may have been due to a lack of

knowledge of social usages, not to any native defect.

Since we are on the theme of what is tactless, I may be pardoned for examples of my meaning. And first and foremost, who is not acquainted, nay intimately, with the slayer and poisoner of one's day, who trips us up in the street, the railway train, or even invades the sanctity of our drawing rooms, with a loudly uttered exclamation upon our forlorn appearance—"Heavens, my dear friend, how shockingly you look!" You are evidently in need of repose, of a physician, of medicines, travel, God knows what—a surgical operation, possibly. And then he bows and nods and passes on to his next victim. I know a sweet sensitive soul who, thus attacked at a street corner, upon the attenuation of her person, and the unhealthy tone of her complexion—"You must surely have some digestive trouble!" the aggressor had exclaimed—hurriedly went home to bed, where she

remained for a week, with a doctor and trained nurse in attendance, and on a regimen of toast and milk. "If I look so repulsive," she said, "I had better keep out of sight." She was, in fact, in excellent health, and her pallor had only been "an hour's defect of the rose," that a night's sleep would have restored to its normal bloom.

Then there is the would-be flatterer, who pays one a pleasant compliment sharpened at the expense of one's past: "How well you are looking! I thought last year it was all up with your beauty;" or, "What a charming gown! I confess the one you wore last evening was distinctly unbecoming."

A handsome woman once told me that an obliging friend paid her this tribute, "Your eyes are really pretty, now that they look less congested than usual!"

"Are my eyes generally congested?" she asked me, turning a pair of splen-

did luminous orbs upon me, in piteous appeal.

There is another person, terrible, searching, malarious, the *enfant terrible* of society, in the world and not of it, in the sense that details, which it is his or her duty to possess, are thoughtlessly ignored. This is the person who sends the lately-made widower a dinner invitation for his wife; who asks the childless woman if her baby has recovered from the measles: the bereaved one if her—dead—child will come to her own offspring's birthday party; the jilted girl when her marriage is to take place; the lately made millionaire who has just moved into his Fifth Avenue palace if he still lives in his flat at Hoboken.

There are the people who always misspell one's name, send one's notes to the wrong address, directing the letter intended for a powerful family to the house of their insignificant relative, and who

ask one where one is living the week after dining with one.

There is a yet profounder lack of tact which seems to take joy in wounding. It marches into your privacy, peers into your secret chambers, longs apparently to disinter the skeleton—there are sometimes two or three which you keep carefully hidden in your cupboard. These torturers "chaff" you lightly upon a subject which is death to you, make jokes upon the one topic which paralyzes even your forbearing sense of humor, and yet all so good-naturedly that you cannot truthfully believe the thrust to be intentional. And here it may be said that an intended blow, inspired by envy and jealousy, may hold a subtle compliment; it is easier to recuperate from its covert innuendo than from the onslaught of pure stupidity. From a slovenly random thrust there is no rallying. The sharp cut of a steel sword heals more readily than the jagged bruise inflicted by a blunderbuss. Another fre-

quent lack of tact is the tendency to attract general notice to what was intended to be concealed. A single instance of this will suffice. Dining once in the modest *ménage* of a newly married pair, a gentleman, as he seated himself on a sofa, before the repast was announced, pushed away with impatience a drapery which was discreetly disposed so as to shroud the rather worn piece of furniture. The young couple had evidently not yet found the means to "re-cover" the faded heirloom.

Not content with his dull-wittedness, the guest turned to the hostess, "I dare not," he said, laughing, "seat myself on all this magnificence." The bit of stuff which he had disturbed was, in fact, of palpably ordinary and cheap material. The child hostess flushed furiously, and her eyes filled with tears. Comment is needless. The man was, in fact, a very decent and kindly fellow. When he attracted attention to the makeshifts of

poverty, he was simply behaving according to his lights. He was cotton-headed. He needed schooling in the fine arts of life. And strangely enough, in the every-day intercourse of weak and erring mortals, these slight pin-pricks make cankering sores.

Louis XIV. was a master of tact. It will be remembered that the forty arm-chairs of the French Academicians were sent by him to placate the susceptibilities of the haughty cardinals who were unwilling to occupy ordinary chairs. He seated all alike; everybody was satisfied, and the astute monarch must have laughed in his sleeve at the childish vanities of men. French tact, grace, and politeness, however, are in their decadence.

CHAPTER VII.

IF Mrs. St. Clair's husband was not a man of fine discernment and of tact, there was a man, a neighbor, who had fulfilled in this particular her most exacting requirements. This man was Geoffrey Odenried. He had met the St. Clairs in the world at home, but it was abroad that the acquaintance had ripened into an intimacy. Their yachts had swung at anchor one summer's morning, side by side, on the Wattensee, between Syltfoln and Amrum. A friendship had then sprung up between Mrs. St. Clair and Mr. Odenried, nay, gossip whispered that the sentiment was somewhat warmer. Odenried was a man dependent upon his friends for comradery and social solace. Of near relatives he had none.

The Marquise Le Moyne did not ex-

amine him very deliberately when he entered her father's drawing room, upon the evening of the dinner party. Bertha had occupied herself with unwonted energy as to the fulfillment of certain requisitions for this first festivity of her homecoming. She and her maid had even made a pilgrimage into the city, to select some rich stuffs and embroideries with which to deck the old house and decorate the table. The sweetest blossoms had been culled from the garden. Madame Le Moyne had herself superintended the burnishing of the quaint colonial chandeliers, with their prismatic crystal drops, until they glistened like diamond gems, of the antique andirons until they shone like gold. The evening being cool, light wood-fires burned in the grates, and the presence of this foreign flower herself, in her delicate attire, with that fine flavor of the Old World which clung about her, added to the dignity of Mr. Breckinridge's hospitality.

If her indifference of manner in greeting Mr. Odenried was somewhat played, not quite genuine, we may attribute it to one of those subtle, hardly acknowledged motives which sway the actions of impressionable women. Or was it possible that a vague premonition of danger, with its attendant instinct of self-preservation, had already awakened in the marquise's gentle breast? There seemed to lurk, at any rate, a certain antagonism in a defensive attitude, which expressed some secret hostility. She received Mr. Odenried politely, but without effusion, almost ignoring his presence before dinner, and placing him at some distance from herself at the table. She was conducted to her seat by Mr. St. Clair, while Mr. Mount Cuthbert sat upon her left; Mount Cuthbert was a little man, thin, cheery, ordinary, and inoffensive. Lollia throned in the seat of honor, Mrs. Mount Cuthbert glittered at Mr. Breckinridge's other elbow, while Mr. Odenried was

flanked by Miss Maria Horner and one of the Misses Larned.

The guests—about twelve in number—knew each other well, and the conversation was animated. An impending election filled the pauses through the soup and fish. On the theme of politics Mr. Breckinridge and Mr. St. Clair had something to say, and said it with considerable vehemence. They were of opposite parties and they tossed the football of their dissension back and forth, hurling good-humored anathemas at each other's favorite candidates, across the stretch of table-cloth. Mr. Breckinridge insisted that what was wanted to fill this particular post was a driver, a man of force, of activity, of will. "We don't want an orator or a poet like your man," he bawled, "we want directness, horse sense, business knowledge. Now Dodd"—Dodd was his favorite—"has all the Western contempt for precedent, for tradition, for conventionality; and I

tell you, St. Clair, that is what we want just here. He is popular with everyone, he doesn't put on any airs. I don't say your man isn't a clever fellow. He's a strong man in his line. I admit he is a speaker, a man of parts, a lucid arguer, quick to parry attack, declamatory, but he is about as fit for the place as—as—my friend Odenried, for instance." This was met by a burst of merriment; some of the ladies clapped their hands. It was evident that, to those who knew him best, Mr. Odenried was not thought to fill the requisites of a local politician.

Bertha Le Moyne now adjusted her jeweled lorgnon, and allowed her eyes to rest a moment on the innocent target of her father's raillery. She did it languidly, but the movement did not escape Mrs. St. Clair. What she saw was a man of between thirty and forty—nearer the former age. He was tall and spare. His thick, curly, dead-brown hair was streaked

with gray, and thrown back from a clean white forehead, which nevertheless bore between the eyes two strong lines; these met the root of the nose, and were accentuated at times into a frown. The eyes were large, of an indistinct grayish blue, cold and deep. Their movements were slow. Nothing indicates high breeding and a lofty mind more surely than the movement of the eye. The quick, eager snap, the sidelong glance, the leer, these are the characteristics of the boor or of the knave.

The nose was finely shaped, and sensitive. A slight mustache covered the upper lip, which had a contemptuous upward curve, the haughty curve which has calculated the baseness of men. The under one was full and red. The chin was well formed and had a cleft at its base. His hands, naturally white, were now somewhat tanned; their nails were long and fine; they were elegant and well cared-for. His complexion was of a uniform

pallor, but this deficient energy of color held no suggestion of unhealthiness; it seemed only to intestify the general distinction of a face which revealed an intellect at once alert and tormented.

Bertha felt that it would be hard to grasp in one furtive survey the full meaning of that peculiar countenance. She felt in that one moment, however, as if she had gazed upon a mask under which lurked possibilities of keenest interest. There was about the man that entire lack of pretension which characterizes persons who are sure of themselves.

Mr. Odenried received the sally at his expense with an amiable man-of-the-world *insouciance*, and met it with a short laugh. Although it might have awakened an unpleasant reminiscence, it evidently passed over him stingless.

Geoffrey Odenried had in fact had, at one time, the Quixotic purpose of serving his country and his State. He had

offered it that large surplus of energy and culture, that overflow of mental equipment which the forming processes of an American college and an English university had bestowed upon and left with him. He had run for Congress. He had been beaten by the son of the village butcher, and he had abandoned the field, not disgusted but amused. He had concluded that for such as he, a man of large fortune and of leisure, there is little room in his own country; but he had not therefore forsaken it. The inheritor of wealth, he was not a purposeless idler. In our country it is a serious question what is to become of men of fine tastes, of varied accomplishments, of polished manners, whose money places them above the necessity for money-getting, and yet whose tendency toward *belles-lettres* is not creative. In Europe the vital interests of diplomacy absorb hundreds of such into its channels. Here there is no such career. "Choice

of the unfittest," seems to be the motto of our foreign service. We are usually represented abroad by men rough of speech, uncouth of manner and dress, poor in purse, and ignorant of the first laws, not only of the etiquette which must perforce exist at foreign courts, not only of foreign languages, but of the proper usage of their own. "Can he speak English?" may become as important a query in sounding the fitness of an ambassador from our English-speaking nation as "Can he speak French?"

If Odenried had buried his talents, such as they were, they nevertheless had borne some fruits. His library had a repute. It was the best in America. It had not been furnished him by his upholsterers. He had selected his books with care and patience; and he not only had done this, he had read them. He was a student, a scholar, and, strange to say, he was also an athlete. He could lift his two hundred pounds easily, fence with agility, and

sail a boat through a stormy sea. Added to this a tinge of ironical contempt for men and things, the gift of a suggestive silence, a punctiliously courteous indifference toward women in general, and a suspected capability for fiery homage toward women in particular.

It is not to be marveled at, then, that Geoffrey Odenried was—in his way—a power. It was said that he could make a woman the fashion. It was also said that he could shoot a deer through the heart, at 150 yards.

While politics were bowled about, Madame Le Moyne had naturally no word to say. "I know nothing of American politics," she had said to Mr. St. Clair, and Geoffrey Odenried had also been conspicuously silent. By and by Mr. St. Clair, thinking his neighbor was probably bored, asked her a question concerning the Italian painter Michetti, who had lately executed an order for him. "Ah, Michetti!" said Bertha, who was more

at home in discussing modern Italian art than local politics. "I know Michetti; he is a wonder. His friends would not believe in him at first, nor would his fellow artists. Friends, you know, always watch a first flight with disapproval. They wait for the world's verdicts. It is very niggardly of them, very ungenerous. When success has come, they readjust themselves; even persuade themselves that they encouraged, that they were for something in it. It is so droll! I went to his studio. He was very amusing. His friends hated his triumphs. I often think to weep with those that weep is human, to rejoice with those that rejoice is godlike. It must be, since it is a command."

"Which of his pictures do you prefer?" asked Mr. St. Clair, who has a gallery of paintings, and posed for knowledge.

"I shall never forget the effect produced upon me by his *Il Voto* in the Capitoline museum at Rome. It was an

experience of life. It is a *chef-d'œuvre.*" Mrs. Mount Cuthbert heard the last word and craned her neck about the roses to ask whose *chef-d'œuvre* they were discussing. The marquise replied, raising her low voice a little. She was drawn on by the questions of others to a certain eloquence in word and gesture. She grew enthusiastic, she described the picture, its impressiveness. Everyone stopped to listen to her. "It is not only well painted," she said, "the artist has high ideals, he touches the heart as well as pleases; and this is always admirable, although the Parisians have voted it superfluous. But, to the many, all art forever remains a secret. I see this every day. It tells them nothing. It might as well for them remain unsung, unspoken. They come away from the great spectacle heavy and dull and calm, like a gourmand gorged from a heavy meal." The subject was puissant, irresistible to the young woman. Her voice trembled as if with

a note of suffering. She hesitated, then stopped. There was a pause. Odenried leaned across the table, one elbow resting upon its edge.

"But you are one of those, Madame Le Moyne," he said, in a voice which he did not raise, but which was clearly audible to her whom he addressed, "who in showing us what you have seen, force us to feel what you have felt." What were the words? Slight, indeed, yet they sent through Bertha's heart a curious sensation of satisfaction, as of being understood. She was here with her own, and yet a stranger. Nevertheless, for some occult reason, she still harbored an antagonism against the man. "I have felt nothing," she answered coldly; "my enjoyment of art is pure dilettanteism, a form of dissipation like any other. All unproductive appreciation is only this. It is like the high phrases of virtuous talk, which result in no great actions—a refined debauchery of the mind—no more."

"You do yourself and all appreciators of art injustice," cried out Mrs. St. Clair. "There must be an audience to the performance, the proscenium box to the play, the man who buys and the man who sells."

Bertha looked up smilingly at Mrs. St. Clair; as she did so she caught Odenried's eyes fixed upon her, and felt herself held by the stubbornness of their poignant glance. She lost, as it were, her breath and her balance. The words she would have spoken faltered and died on her lips; and she raised her feather fan quickly before her face, that he might not detect that she had blushed. If he saw the maneuver he made no sign, but turned to devote himself to Miss Horner, who entertained him for the rest of the evening—she felt this to be the subtlest strategy—on the beauty, grace, and wit of dear Lollia. How indeed could she better please him, she who had taken such a tender though reprehensible interest in

their flirtation? She was even more demure and tamer than usual, lest Lollia should take umbrage, poor simple soul that she was!

"So you think all study and culture that lead to no result only serve to weaken and emasculate the soul, Madame Le Moyne?" said a gentleman who sat on the left of Mrs. St. Clair. "What do *you* say?" he asked, turning to his neighbor.

"Oh, I think anything is good which is refining. I have studied music. I cannot play a note for my friends, or sing a little song to them. Yet I don't regret the time spent. It has enlarged my powers of enjoyment, and hence was not wasted time."

"There comes the question: is pleasure a waste of time?" said Mrs. Mount Cuthbert. "I for one think every moment that is not devoted to amusement a mistake!" There was a cry of protest, "What dreadful dogma is this?"

"Well, I have got courage at any rate to express my opinion."

"And that is a rare gift," said Mr. Cranston, gallantly coming to the rescue. His face got purple at his own audacity, and he choked and spluttered over his champagne glass. "I admire pluck."

"Why, I never could have dragged myself here to-night if I hadn't been plucky. One of my lungs is quite gone, quite. Just listen!" And the little lady struck her collar-bone two or three times, with her diamonded fingers, so that there was, in fact, emitted a hollow reverberation.

"Your lungs?"

"Yes—you look incredulous—but one is gone already, as I tell you. Just hear me cough!" And she gave a hack, with a desperate effort.

"I thought it was the *heart*," murmured her next neighbor.

"Heart! pshaw, that was all wrong once, but it's on the mend."

"Hear her!" whispered Lollia St. Clair, "hear her talking of her *heart*. Why she doesn't know there is such a thing in the world. Don't you remember when her baby died? Some women feel nothing—a little scrap of a crape bonnet perked on top of her crimps for half a year—that was all; it was grotesque."

"Hasn't Madame Le Moyne a bright face?" said Miss Larned, looking at Odenried with an arch giggle. She had been angling for a compliment on her own account, and had now given up in dispirited discomfiture. Bright? what did the word suggest? Something hard, metallic, glistening; yet even gold is undiscernible to the uninitiated. Its purest glitter is lost in the alloy which reddens and coarsens the pristine texture. Bright? Once more he turned to scan, with comprehensive glance, that sensitive and ardent face. Was this all, then, that it said to others? "Bright?" To him

it had appeared to hold an unrevealed world of haunting promise. To him it had seemed full of melancholy and of passion.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE is a habit of charity which inherently wishes to do the right thing. Children of wrath, in their cynicism, think it a mere form of self-gratification, but all good habits have been gained through sacrifice. Left very young with a little child and an old woman dependent upon her for their welfare—almost for their life—Bertha Le Moyne had early learned to think for and to do for others. She now turned her thoughts to that father and brother across whose neglected threshold her light step had in a few weeks brought a radiancy of warmth and sunshine.

In Mr. Breckinridge's heart the gracious visitant had awakened new desires and aims. He and John vied with each other to do her service.

John worked early and late that his sister might have the fruits and flowers that he delighted, in his foolish pride, to bring to her in their season—nay, before; and Mr. Breckinridge would have been ashamed to bring the flush and tremor of the winecup into that pure and refined presence. With an almost heroic persistence he banished all superfluous indulgence from his daily regimen, and John sheepishly followed his father's example. "Be decent while your sister Bertha is staying with us," his father had said to him sternly, one night when his son had returned three times to the alluring decanter which stood upon the old sideboard; and the reproof had not needed to be enforced. There seemed, indeed, to pervade the old homestead a new incentive to hopefulness and cheerfulness.

Bertha and Lollia St. Clair saw each other almost daily. Their childish intimacy was resumed with the added sympathies of their rounded womanhood.

One summer's day, walking in the garden, Bertha had stepped on a rolling stone and sprained an ankle. It was not serious, but she was forced to keep her room for a week; and during this enforced confinement Mrs. St. Clair was assiduous in attentions and kindness, showered Bertha with flowers and books, sat with her for hours, and Bertha, who was a little lonely, was grateful to her friend. So it came about that one evening, as they sat under the trees together, there were confidences.

The night was soft and full of suffocating perfume; the heavens, of a faint rose color, were heavy with languor. There was a sort of anguish in the air. The two young women leaned against the tree trunks, their elegant silhouettes shadowed against the sky. They were fanning themselves for the fevered heat, and speaking in low voices. There was a sadness in their tones; did it rise from their hearts, or was it only born of

that inquietude which hangs forever upon the dying summer? They spoke together of the disenchantment of all aspiration. "Ah, but," said Lollia, "there are aspirations for happiness so selfish that they seem to drown the sensibilities!"

Bertha looked at her; "I don't understand," she said.

Lollia grew pale; "Love, for instance," she murmured.

"I thought love awoke them," said Bertha, smiling.

"Do you know it?" said Lollia.

"I have known a strong affection—yes," said Bertha.

"Ah, affection; that is not what I spoke of; love drowns affection, ambition, everything."

"I am not sure if I know that kind," said Bertha, still smiling. "I hope not."

"I know it," said Lollia.

Then Bertha, being a woman, leaned to her friend. "Tell me," she said. And

Lollia St. Clair told her all—all the wretchedness of her position, the misery of her splendid life, the hideous lie she lived. "If I am not a criminal," she said, "it is not my fault, for daily, hourly I long for freedom. Oh, but I hate—I loathe my life!"

"But you have not done wrong, Lollia?" asked Bertha with solicitude.

"What do you call wrong, Bertha? I am married to one man, and I love another. I am anxious, nay eager to be free. Is not that wicked? I think if I were free he would marry me, and the thought pursues me, is not that wrong?"

"If he has won your love," said Bertha, the blood surging suddenly from her heart to her face, "he would indeed be a hound if he would not. Of course you know, when I married, I took my husband's faith. We accept no compromises—death is the only release. With you it may be different—if you have no scruples. . . . ."

"Yes, he has won my heart. Surely, surely I have some claim! I had scruples; I felt like you; all, all is swept away. I love the man—that is all I know."

Bertha was shocked. "Claim," she said, "that is a mean word. I shall think it is you, not I, who do not understand the meaning of love's message."

"Don't be hard on me, dear; I am most miserable. Lately, Bertha, I know not why, I have thought—I have felt——" but she did not conclude her sentence, and she rose, wringing her hands and walking up and down under the tree-boughs. "Last night again," she went on a little wildly, "I expected a note from him, but it didn't come, it didn't come! There were people. I had to smile, to grimace. Faugh! Ah, how I hate myself! Bertha, have you ever waited—do you know what it means? I went to my room. My heart broke."

"Do you mean," asked Bertha, "that

you think he is growing cold to you?"

"Yes, sometimes a hideous doubt besets me. I sometimes think on his part it was a mere caprice, a fancy, a man's whim. Do we women know these things? While with me——"

"With you?"

"It was life or death!"

"But you have done no wrong?" persisted Bertha. She was conscious of an impulse of hate toward him who thus made her friend suffer.

"I have not done what you call wrong; no, dear," said Lollia, flushing. "You need not shrink from me, you can still take my hand."

"O Lollia!" said Bertha, "O Lollia!" and she began to weep.

"You may well weep, for it is terrible."

"Tell me how it was," said Bertha.

"There is not much to tell; we met, he seemed to like me, he seemed to care. I was wildly struggling against the bonds

that riveted me. My marriage is nothing to me, worse than nothing; it is a net in which I am caught fast."

"Your husband——"

"Is a man the world calls good, the world respects. There are those who err, Bertha, but who have princely natures. He does not err, but he is small, and *never* rises, never. To be tied to him is to me a living death."

"Ah, but, Lollia, surely, surely——" Bertha's eyes looked at her friend with that pathetic expression one sometimes sees in the nearsighted when they remove their glasses, gropingly; she was dazed.

Lollia went on in accents of deep agitation. "No—I know what you would say. It is too late. Evil doers, you see," she went on, "have their logic. I am unrepentant." Bertha felt a sense of disheartening fatality. Then, Lollia fell again to speaking of her "claim." This jarred on Madame Le Moyne. Love

shrank. She rose half impatiently, "One would surely not insist on an unwilling homage!" she said.

"You speak the language of coquetry. I am beyond that."

Lollia slipped her hand into Bertha's arm. As she did so the latter was conscious of that febrile energy of purpose in her friend, which would cling in spite of protest. The code of honor demanded, no doubt, that the man should not forsake, but—must not such honor be spontaneous? They walked toward the sea together. The hand which touched Bertha's arm was strong and guided, "This way," and Bertha was fain to choose the path that Lollia chose. These small indications reveal character. Lollia, then, felt no loss of self-respect, of delicacy, in asserting a claim; or if she did so, was too desperate and resolved to care. "No such woman can hold a man," thought Bertha; "it is herself she will punish!" But pitifulness kept her

silent. "If we do not blame the vessel which drags its anchor in the tempest," she thought, "why be harsh to judge this frail human bark, caught and whirled in a storm, rocking and veering and missing its moorings?" Yet there had been something antagonistic to her in Lollia's words. "She lacks femininity," she said to herself."

"You blame me, Bertha?"

"No. I do not judge you. I dare not." They had stepped down now upon the sands. Bertha felt a little weary. She looked about her at nature with its tranquil beauty, devoid of desires, of conscience. She craved its peace. "I am constant," continued Lollia, as if seeking some excuse. "I never looked at another; there are no others in the world for me. I never imagined anything like it."

Bertha thought that such constancy might be only another name for the love of pleasure, such pleasure as her friend

might find in this unhappy sentiment. To bear indignity is not always noble. But as she could not be honest to her friend without being harsh to her, she contented herself with a blind resentment against the man who had thus added to the pain of existence. In her dismay, disconcerted and astonished, she concluded the moral obliquity must all lie with him. "He is not a man," she thought, "with whom a woman can afford to make a mistake." She remembered that he had allowed himself to look into her eyes. At the memory she felt hotly indignant, almost polluted. Yet—yet—she had guessed the allurement. To recognize enticement one must be somebody one's self, have had some experience. She had recognized the allurement, against her will. Strong natures blow hot and cold; tepidity is the temperature of mediocrity. Odenried had not seemed mediocre. Had he reached the chill of mountain summits, and left poor Lollia in the val-

ley below? "Hateful man!" thought Bertha. Yes, and there *had* been something in him which might well steep the senses and devour the heart, and *he* left cold! What a lesson!

"You saw him," said Lollia. "Did you not understand the attraction?" She had felt secretly annoyed that Madame Le Moyne had volunteered no opinion.

"I really did not look at him," said Bertha. Lollia was rather pleased. She almost wished Bertha had found him insignificant. It was of her own value she was dying to be reassured. To her grief she knew well enough this man's power. "Fancy," she said, laughing now, "not seeing him!"

"These attractions," said Bertha, "are so incomprehensible—if you are sure——"

"I am sure of nothing," said Lollia. "I am not vain. It is easier to renounce a love of which we are sure."

"Ah," cried Bertha, "what a truth!"

"If I were sure, I sometimes think I could give him up."

"Ah, dear, would that you could!"

Then Lollia uttered this strange cry, "How I have envied women who had bad husbands!"

"You feel as if there were no palliation——"

"There is excuse, but none to the world." Lollia's opulent form and her rich garments did, in fact, stamp her inexcusable, in the eyes of a world which sees nothing of the pathetic in the sorrows of its pampered ones. The thought struck Bertha.

"You must not look so prosperous, so handsome," she said more lightly, "if you crave pity."

Lollia laughed. She looked down upon herself. "This gown is, in fact, indecent to complain in," she said with a quaint little groan. It was a resplendent thing of crimson and gold. "I often feel my inability to inspire pity."

"Frankly, in a casual observer you could not."

"Well, old age will come soon," said Lollia, sighing, "and then I shall be pitiful and pathetic enough. I have missed my life." Then she added with a note of true sweetness and womanliness in her voice, "Pray for me, dear little Bertha; who knows but you some day may be needing *my* prayers? You are pretty and fascinating, and the wrong-doing born of these things may come. In all your pride and loveliness, you, too, are a poor sinner like me. Who knows . . . all these things—they too will pass—perhaps—and be forgiven——"

Bertha's eyes filled. "Yes," she said, "I, too, am weak."

CHAPTER IX.

GEOFFREY ODENRIED was at his desk writing. He had given Mr. Vream, his private secretary, a month's holiday, and was attending to his own correspondence. He hated it. Geoffrey was no indolent gentleman. He was, as I have said before, something of a student and a scholar. He was active in all manly exercises. He took a mitigated interest in his domains; but the drudgery of any ordinary routine exasperated him. He fought against it like a wild hawk caught in a fish-net. He wrote with a rebelling creak of the pen, rapidly, rather illegibly, marking a sharp dash under his signature. By and by he uttered an exclamation of weariness, pushed away from the desk, tilted his chair, put his hands in his vest pockets, and stared at the ceiling. It was

darkly paneled in old oak, a goodly enough ceiling to drown one's reverie in. The room was large and dim, lighted by faint side-lights, and a red lamp on the great carved center table. It cast its flame on the young man's forehead, which was puckered and wrinkled, frowning, lowering. He got up and moved about, looking for a match. He found one, and in a moment had lit a cigarette.

The night was a cold one, as is often the case on the Long Island shores, where the hot, dry days drift into sea-winds, and are swallowed in dampness.

He kicked a fallen log back into the grate, where a low fire was burning. The kick was pregnant with suggestion; one felt that it was not addressed to the log in particular. It was too vehement; it might have been aimed at the coat-tail of an enemy, or even at a recalcitrant, disagreeable world. At any rate it seemed a form of relief. Physical exertion is often the only form of respite from

mental strain. But the kicking of dumb wood will hardly clear a horizon heavy with storm cloud. The frown did not lift entirely; it seemed rather to travel slowly downward and settle in set compression upon the lips. He threw up one hand and passed it once or twice through his thick, graying hair, as if he would dismiss some preying idea. He began to pace up and down the room.

Most of the furniture was antique, as were the hangings and panelings; but here and there the apartment had its modern attributes. Particularly modern were some portraits, photographs principally, of fair women, disporting themselves in a variety of rococo and gilded frames. Of these there was quite a collection. But upon the writing table there was but one. It was draped in purple velvet, and stood on a small easel under the light. It represented Lollia St. Clair, in the full splendor of diamond tiara and worldly array. She looked out

commandingly from under her crown. As he walked to and fro, to and fro, he stopped presently, beside this picture. The table was large, and he had to lean across it to reach the portrait. He drew it toward himself with a quick gesture.

He sat down again and began to examine it curiously, as one would a countenance which held the secret of some fateful import.

In the features there was a certain nobility; yes, certainly, she was not light. He told himself this. He did her that cruel justice we do to those we have ceased to love. He did her full justice. More than justice. He exaggerated her virtues. He dwindled her defects. Love is less lenient. He could think of her with respect, with pity, even with a measure of tenderness, with every sentiment which surges up from a dead passion. Had it been a passion? "My God!" he said aloud, still holding the picture in his hands, "My God!" There

had come to Geoffrey one of those experiences which, because they are so common, are none the less the bitterest that can fall to man's lot. In a moment of idleness and folly he had roused a sleeping tigress; she was mastering him. There was one thing in him she could control and torture—his honor. He had wrought the mischief; should he now shrink at its cost? No matter how, no matter why, no matter when; in an hour, not much more, the deed had been done, an unguarded hour, under warm skies, in distant, lonely seas, where the very stars had lent themselves to this misapprehension and this crime. A beautiful, unhappy woman! A word of consolation spoken—oh, ardently, no doubt. He would not lie unto himself; his nature, roused, was ardent. Then the quick awakening, the recognition that the ardor had been but born of a summer's night, fleet as the flight of birds, swallow-like, falling swiftly from song into silence. But Lollia had listened

to the song. She had listened and she had answered, and now she held him in a leash against which he chafed with an intolerable fatigue of the present, and a clear-eyed presage of the future that he felt closing about him with relentless surety. She was becoming more and more reckless, more and more determined; and surely it is not a man's rôle, that of prudence; it is not a man that shall say, "Pause!" Yet, he had said it—loathing himself for saying it; as only he can who questions his own motive. Ah, happy he who shields his mistress' honor through overloving her! Sometimes it seemed absurd to him. There was nothing. He awoke free. It was ridiculous. He would tell her. She should know the truth. He had misunderstood his own sentiments, hers, too, no doubt. He would give her every chance. He would offer, of course, to marry her, should she obtain her freedom; but he would treat her with abso-

lute sincerity. He would offer to marry her, give every sop to her feminine pride and vanity; but he would cease to lie; other women had borne it. Truth was best. God knows that even now there had been at times a brutal truthfulness that only a woman sunk in her infatuation could fail to see. Then there would come a sudden rush of pity, pity for her obtuseness; a picture of the tears, the reproaches, the anguish. Her strength was all lost in her great love. She had a blanched look sometimes, a sudden trembling of the hands; they pierced him. The ridiculous in his own position fell, the pathos in hers rose to stifle him. But pity, which whips a woman's love to madness, is ever the grave of a man's passion.

Nevertheless, many times he had gone to give the blow, and had stayed to console—hateful parrying for which he scorned and scourged himself. To a shallow, vulgar nature such struggle is

unknown ; a way of escape is found. It is the princely ones who flounder ; they cannot weigh and calculate. It is the best who give themselves.

And it was just here in this dilemma that Bertha had found them. He thought of her to-night, this graceful lady, the newcomer. Geoffrey had loved the beauty of women as one loves that of flowers. He had loved their beauty because his temperament was that of the artist ; but he had not loved them much—not overmuch. Yet, strangely lovely as Madame Le Moyne had appeared to him—he remembered her long graceful limbs, her slight bust, her shapely hands perfectly—it was of her he thought, not of her person ; of her. Women will understand the difference. It was upon her inner self that he pondered. What was hidden, veiled, unknowable, in that proud, still glance ? How calmly it had rested on his face ! What did it hold of unfathomed and untold ? What lay in

that soul whose riddle had so interested him? What unslaked longing? What vague curiosity bent on a world at once too sordid and too paltry to fill its requirements? He felt it to be fastidious and delicate. He could not disguise to himself that her manner had been only less haughty than her eyes; for in them he had read a certain airy, ill-disguised contempt. Yet why? In this weakness, for which he scorned himself to-day, was there no note of nobleness? He found himself wondering how much she knew. Had she read his secret? Lollia's? Had Lollia spoken? He could not blame her, he pitied; yet instantly the man's reserve rose in protest. Was it only his reserve, or was there, in the recesses of his being, a secret dislike to having his heart bared to this stranger's unfriendly scrutiny? Unfriendly he had felt it to be and it had piqued. There stirred within him a sort of anger against her—anger that she should judge him—and a curious desire

to say or do something that should justify him in her judgment.

As he placed Mrs. St. Clair's photograph back upon the table, and lit another cigarette, he had a half amused, jealous desire to be put, in this young woman's presence, to some test of manliness, courage, and prowess, in which he should acquit himself with valor and distinction. He smiled at his own fatuity. Strangely enough, in his intercourse with Lollia, there had been no such aspiration. It had all been effort, there had been no wing. He told himself that Madame Le Moyne's fine scorn would give one wings. The hawk needs a contrary wind to his highest flight. There are natures that opposition does not crush but invigorates. That mocking smile upon the corner of her lip! It might readily scathe a man, yet it might encourage him to soar.

"Yes," he said, half aloud, "would that there were a war, a battle to fight, a sword to unsheathe, a dragon to kill! Good

heavens, what shabby dragons it is we fight nowadays—money and whisky, capital and socialism! We spend, or drink, or grapple with them in vain. Would that I might kill a real dragon, like the knights of old! Then this sweet, haughty lady would see that Geoffrey Odenried is not the chicken-livered booby she thinks him to-night. Pshaw! she thinks nothing at all! I represent to her the epicene creature which the high-souled woman sees in her friend's lover. A lover who has not even the pluck to carry off her friend in the face of an accusing world!" He shook the ashes from his fingers and smiled, but his smile was not a pleasant one. "I dare say the marquise would be exacting in such matters. She has probably read French novels and is intensely silly." He rather liked the idea—"an intensely silly woman." He repeated it several times—yes, "despicably silly."—"Nothing so fatal as French culture on American soil; the virtues of

both nations destroyed. The French at least are practical. They have a lot of good sense." After all, good sense, that was what a man wanted in a woman! He began to understand the secret of misalliances. "Great ladies have no sense. It is really safer to marry a chambermaid, or no—the cook! There's old Mr. Butternuts: his cook made him very happy, I am told. Well, why not? There is no nonsense in such women, no airs. They stir the soup-pot and rear the children, and are grateful to their master if he marries them on his death-bed." Then being a dreamer, he fell into a half dream. "How sick I am of this so-named civilization! Nature," he thought, "alone gives gravity and dignity to our passions. She can deride alike the devices of gods and men; in her umbrage and her sunshine, how puerile seem their little vanities, how fragile their small pleasures. She cares not for us. It is only the poets who assure us nature lives for us. *Sunt*

lachrimæ rerum is a melodious falsehood. The farther we go from civilization the nearer we are to nature. Simplicity, that is everything. To simplify our emotions. How mysterious it all is, and what lassitude! Eternal Venus, cruel goddess, thy altars crush us! Endlessly renewed myth, Jupiter and Antiope. Ah, well! what matter if the god disguise himself as a force of nature, a child of Pan, satyr with hoof and flute, and symbol of savage love, idyllic? Always the rude awakening!"

The big clock struck twelve in the hall, but Odenried moved not; he moved not lest he should disturb a phantom. He felt it lean upon his breast. He dared not breathe. "Are you afraid of me?" he asked it. "Why do you shrink from me? Am I not strong enough to support you? Ah, the bliss of holding you for a moment thus pressed against my heart! Don't you feel that it beats for you? Have I not

the energy to carry you away, off to the ends of the universe?"

"Oh," said the phantom, "your arms hold me too tightly. I think you will hurt me, yet I am happy. You can never leave me now, I know it. It was our fate; we had to meet."

"Ah, beloved one, yes, yes, I love thee, as a saint is adored, as a splendid woman is desired, as a goddess is worshiped of mortals!"

And now the past grew vague, floating without him, like a mist on distant hills, so vague that it seemed as if it could never have been. New impressions awoke, and at every beat of the time-piece, more and more, in a neutral gray dawn faded the years, and a rosy aurora cast its aureole about a beloved face. Odenried started; upon him lay a puissant spell, something precious and dear, something which fills, which dominates, holds, guides. The vision, seen but once, remained vanquisher, nestling in a heart

forever conquered. He shook himself and rose from his dream. He had slept. Some sparks upon the hearthstone burst into sudden flame. They revealed Lollia's eyes, black, implacable, frowning through the gloom, under her jeweled brows.

CHAPTER X.

EARLY the next day he ran down across the short brown grass—there had been a drouth, the herbage was all wan and sere—under the birch trees, to his boat house. He fumbled in his vest-pocket, found the key, and went in. It was stiflingly hot, and smelt of wood varnish. A myriad flies were buzzing upon the dusty panes, eager to escape into the sunshine. The boatman was evidently not on the premises, but Odenried was rather relieved. He detested people always at his heels. To-day he was in an ungenial, savage mood. There were moments when a human visage was hateful to him. There was a little boat, a shallow, ducking thing, on the ways. He got behind it and pushed it, first cautiously, then firmly and swiftly,

down through the opened door on to the sands. He came back to find his oars. In a minute he had slipped the tiny craft into the waves, had sprung in, and was making for the *Baby*. The *Baby* was a small catboat which he used now and then for short trips across the bay. She was a toy. He handled her with one hand. He had in five minutes pushed in the tiller, which lay under the seat, and hoisted the sail. A breeze came wafting by with a whirr and a sigh; it caught the *Baby* in its coy embrace. The old sail, somewhat stained and soiled, shook uneasily a moment, then puffed, swelled, like a child's soft cheek blowing at soap bubbles, and off she skimmed, tipping westward across the tide.

"This will be the shortest way," he muttered to himself, "since go I must. Who can delay to do a lady's bidding?" He had received with his breakfast that morning, a word from Lollia:

It is imperative that I see you at once. Not a sign from you for two days. I am leaving. I don't suppose you care, but it would be more decent for you to come.

LOLLIA ST. C.

"Humph!" he had said. Then he had read the letter again and thrown it torn into the grate.

He found her in a vine-embowered corner of the piazza, lying in a hammock, her head against a rose-colored cushion, a thin white veil drawn over her face, and a white lace umbrella shading her eyes. She extended her hand, and he stooped and touched his lips to the ends of her long nails. "You look warm," she said.

He sat down near to her, facing her, took off his hat, and began to fan himself. The wind blew his hair about. Lollia's note had relieved her. Its bitterness had put her in a better humor. Besides, she had been schooling herself for the past hour. Men hated scenes; she would

make none, no—not to-day. She would be light and amusing until he should not believe the writer of that foolish missive and Mrs. St. Clair, the belle and beauty, could be the same.

"I hurried to your summons," he said; "the sun was scorching on the water, the wind was with me."

"It is a long time since you have taken me out in the *Baby;* is it she you have?"

"You know I am always at your orders." There was something perfunctory in his voice which stirred and irritated her.

"How forced that sounds!" She was trying to be light, but it was difficult.

"What would you have me say?"

"Oh, nothing; no matter. Do you know I am going away? My commands," she spoke bitterly, "were issued to me this morning. Milly was ill in the night. Her father, the physicians, say

this salt air is bad for her cough. We start for the mountains this evening."

"It seems very sudden."

"And is that all you have to say?" The man remained silent; their eyes met. He moved his away uneasily from hers.

"*Du reste*, it cannot matter to anyone. No one will miss me, I fancy, except perhaps Bertha."

"You have been everything to her."

"Yes, she will miss me, I believe. What do you think of her?" A dark flush mounted to Odenried's forehead.

"What do I think of her?—How do you mean?"

"How do I mean? What folly! Don't repeat my words, it gives me crispations."

"Really," he said, laughing impatiently, "I seem to annoy you so much with my presence, perhaps I had better leave you."

"Geoffrey!" her voice was full of tears.

"Well, what do you want of me?"

"And this from you! I am silly, I admit. My nerves are all unstrung; another scene last night. Be patient; this life is killing me. Do not you forsake me!"

"You are childish; who talks of forsaking?" He cursed himself for an inflection of tenderness in his voice. She sprang to it.

"Ah, you do care, then! Say you do, say you do, say so—oh, my God, Geoffrey, what is to become of me?"

"You borrow trouble. You make yourself ill."

"Do I look ill?" she asked anxiously.

"No, of course not." Then he added, after a short pause, "You are radiant."

She became so. "Is my gown becoming? Cranston likes it, and that man of wood has taste; yes, really." She was still trying to control herself, to speak carelessly. "I shall miss the Horner *fête*. Shall you go?"

"What a question! Do I go to *fêtes?* Have I ever gone anywhere, except to plea—to meet you, for—for—years?"

"Ah, but now there might be other attractions!"

"Others?"

"Why yes."

"I don't understand."

"Why, Bertha Le Moyne."

"What foolishness!"

"But if you won't tell me what you think, I will tell you what I think; she is a fascinating woman. Such grace, such a figure, and she is good too." Mr. Odenried said nothing.

"You don't believe in anybody's goodness."

"I do, in yours."

"Thank you, don't be too certain. If I meet with any temptations in the mountains I shall yield at once. The Fred Cramers are there, Rollins, Saportas, and others."

"Ah!"

"But if you saw me in another man's arms you wouldn't be jealous, now would you? Speak——" She raised herself in the hammock, and fixed her large eyes on his. "Such charming confidence, it is touching!"

"Is it for this you sent for me, Mrs. St. Clair?" She knew she was losing him. She felt it. What devil pushed her to say and do the very thing she had sworn to herself, half an hour since, should be unsaid, undone?

"Ah," she went on, making another desperate effort at lightness, "you will say it is all a matter of temperament. Well, mine is not the trusting sort."

"No, it is not. Yet when have I given you cause to distrust me?" What was a man to do, great Heavens! with that piteous look on her mouth?

"Dear Geoffrey, give me your hand!" He leaned over and she clutched at it. The contact of her hot palm awoke in him no answering thrill.

"You seem feverish," he said.

"I am feverish, consumed, it is killing me!" she repeated. She played with his long, strong fingers. By and by she stooped suddenly and fastened her lips upon them.

"Dear Lollia," he said, "my big brown hand isn't worthy, don't."

"Big brown hand! There never were such hands on a man. Why, they are whiter than mine! And those artistic points to your fingers! They are the hands of a king." She felt his fingers move in hers. "What is it?"

"I heard a step."

"Well?" She still clung to him.

"I saw your husband, a moment ago, coming up the path. Oh, I don't care. Of course the sooner the better for me!" He laughed harshly.

"I sometimes feel," and she flung his hand from her, "as if, if I had a knife, I would like to plunge it and turn it in your breast."

"Why don't you do it? God knows I do not wish to make you suffer!" he said earnestly.

"You make me suffer, you make me suffer, you make me suffer the tortures of the lost!"

"Be reasonable a moment. You know I am ready to take you; you have my word upon it; but why, until you decide upon the step, jeopardize all your peace?"

"Reasonable! Were you so reasonable that night on the Österdæ?"

"I have learned a cruel wisdom," he said, "since then; the wisdom disappointment teaches."

"Is it in me you are disappointed?"

"How can you think it? But look at our position——" There was a step on the gravel.

"Ah, Odenried, how are you?" The men shook hands. If Lollia's touch had evoked no thrill of ecstasy, her husband's was like a snake's bite to the young

man. Honor hung her head, blushing, balked.

"Will you stop and breakfast?" asked Lollia faintly.

"I think not to-day. Clarke is coming up to fish with me at two, off the Greffken rocks. He's got a man with him from town. They must be entertained, I suppose, at the house."

"As you like," she spoke quietly, with lowered eyelids.

"I see the socialists are playing at ninepins with royal heads again," said Mr. St. Clair, waving his morning paper.

"Yes," said Lollia. "There are bread riots, disturbances, incendiary meetings."

"To oppose them requires the temerity of the young bull that gets in front of the steam engine," said Odenreid. "Ah, well; no one has yet grappled with the difficulty. It will take time, patience, genius."

"I rather admire them," said Mrs. St.

Clair. "They are but the result of injustice. I am myself a revolutionist."

"And very foolishly so," said her husband coldly.

"Royalty and its I, I eternal, its junketings, its feigned respectability, its portraits that nobody wants, its silly vanity, is done for," said Odenried. "People have ceased to take seriously these puppet kings who cut a handsome figure, spend the public revenues, wear their ermine tippets, and let others govern them. They are too frivolous. It is indecent in this restless age full of important problems."

"I see you think monarchy is played out."

"Absolutely. It is only the question now of a very few years, a general republic and volapük. Nothing can stem the current. Oh, perhaps, if they would marry peasants, bring in some pure, healthy blood, there might be hope; but the world is growing intelligent, it declines to be imposed upon by a lot of

scrofulous blackguards, and it really is too bad, you know. Why, just look around now, on these European thrones—a lot of jaded, crazy, debauched blockheads. And the women not much better, invalids, hysterical, witless fashion-plates, no more. Not even handsome. The Empress of Austria is the best. She at least has a romantic personality, is an individual, appeals to the imagination, that is something." He talked rapidly.

Lollia had closed her eyes. Odenried saw a large tear form and trickle from under her eyelashes. He rose. "Well, good-day. I must be off. I hear, St. Clair, you are bound for the Adirondacks. I hope you will find some sport. I hope the trip will benefit Miss Milly." He stooped with his back to her husband, and spoke a low word to Lollia. "Write to me," he said gently. "Send me your address."

But she did not answer him. "Good-

by," she said, smiling, "good-by." They shook hands.

St. Clair walked as far as the garden gate with Odenried. She got up and went slowly up to her room. "I will put on a costume," she thought. "I must take a walk before breakfast; the exercise is beneficial." She pulled off her high-heeled mules and her silken hose, and tripped across the parquet floor. She walked timidly, swayingly, as women do who are not accustomed to moving on bare feet. She drew on a pair of black silk stockings, and slipped her feet into black shoes. As she leaned forward, her tightly laced satin corset cracked on her hip. The room was filled with the throbbing sound of her heaving bosom.

"It is over!" she kept saying to herself, "over!" Great tears fell from her eyes as she tied the shoes. In her soul was dismay, despair, and terror. She fastened her own veil. She would not ring for a maid to spy upon her. A

rush of fury shook her. "What? He throws me off now, now, like that, when he has won my love—when I am distraught, mad? He shall not,' he dare not! I have some claim, some right. A man does not treat a woman thus. He dare not. The whole world would be against him, would—I hate him." But here she faltered. "Who knows? Perhaps I exaggerate. It has been difficult for him—is difficult. I torment him, I lack tact, I try him with my reproaches. Ah! and to-day I had meant to be so different. How easy it would have been to be playful, graceful, coquettish, had he been ardent. But all my resolutions die before his icy composure. That calm, that reason, which he blames me for not cultivating; how I despise them! *Yes*, I *hate* him—with his Empress of Austria!" She shot down the stairs like an arrow, hurrying breathlessly through the laurel bushes to the cliff which overhung the sound. "If his boat is out of sight," she

thought, with the singular superstition which is a part of strongly individual egoistic natures—there was a burning sensation of pain at her throat—"if his boat is out of sight, I am lost. But if—if——" Her eyes strained, dazzled, over the lonely glitter of a light blue sea. There was nothing, nothing! Yet, here, what? She craned forward, hugging the bank; the *Baby* swung out for one moment, around the Greffken Rock, and then, tacking about, was swallowed from sight behind a shelving shore. As she turned to retrace her steps, with a certain sense of assuagement and relief, she found the Marquise Le Moyne at her elbow.

"I was so surprised to get your note, to hear of this new plan. I came to say adieu. I met Mr. St. Clair and Mr. Odenried," said Bertha. "Your husband detained me for a while in your gardens. What splendid roses! superb, quite like those at home, at the *château.*

I mean I have seen none such here before."

"Yes, we go for some weeks, perhaps all of the summer. Did Odenried stay long?" asked Lollia.

"No, he seemed in a hurry, said he had some engagement."

"You understand that he doesn't exactly adore my husband," said Lollia with a short laugh.

The words grated on Bertha, but she said "Naturally."

Bertha had met the two men, and they had stopped and spoken to her. She had given her hand to Mr. St. Clair, to Odenried she had accorded a slight stare and a frigid nod of recognition, when he had lifted his hat.

"If you speak for one of Lady Ethel's pups in time, Odenried," Mr. St. Clair was saying, "she is yours. Ethel's mother and brother took the first Kalmia prize at the bench show. Breckinridge has just given Mrs. St. Clair one of Fancy's.

Next spring the pups will be beauties, sired by Lohengrin." Bertha's elevated eyebrow did not escape Odenried, and again he felt conscious of that absurd anger against her, such as one might feel against a person who had discovered one listening at a door.

"Thanks," he said, a little curtly. "I have got more dogs now than I can manage."

"I won't press another on you," said Mr. St. Clair, laughing. "They're worth money."

Bertha looked up and smiled at Odenried. She liked him better for his refusal of the dog. He flushed, he knew not why. Was this woman thus to drive the blood, every time he met her, from his heart? Yes, even her name heard, carelessly spoken. He turned and, saying his farewells, left them abruptly. Bertha, who was very observing, thought that she noticed a defiance in his retreating step. "It has become simply intolerable," he

thought to himself, as he unmoored the *Baby* with a jerk which sent her flying like a falcon from its jesses. "I am in hell!"

Bertha's visit was short. She thought it a little strange that Lollia did not invite her to remain to breakfast.

CHAPTER XI.

ABOUT a week later Madame Le Moyne was alone in the drawing room one afternoon. Mr. Breckinridge and John had gone to town. She had brought a book to the piazza, but it had been too hot there. She had returned into the house. She was lying on her back stretched upon a deep couch reading. It was a French book she read. It had arrived by mail the day before, a book which one of her adorers had sent to her from the other side. It must have been very absorbing, for she did not hear a step upon the porch or see a shadow on the blind of the opened French window.

"Am I intruding?"

"Ah, who is it?"

"May I come in without disturbing you?" She half rose. Mr. Odenried

had pushed the shutter. The red and gold twilight was still in his eyes. He guessed her, where she lay amid the cushions. He could hardly see her in the shaded apartment.

"Why, certainly. I was resting this warm afternoon." She stood up before him, bowed gravely, and motioned to a chair without giving him her hand.

"Your book was interesting. I spoke twice and you did not hear."

"Ah, psychology! what will you have?" She toyed with a bunch of deep purple heliotrope she wore at her belt.

"Do you like those flowers? I have so many about my house; they waste themselves unpicked."

"Heliotrope means devotion, does it not?" said Bertha. "Yes, it is my favorite. I think I like it because it is so perishable."

"That is an excellent woman's reason, like the subtleties of her caprice. But do I not disturb you?" he repeated.

"Not in the least. Why do you ask?"

"I should hate to disturb you, because I am rather afraid of you, madame; but I remembered that the days had grown into the weeks, and that, save a card slipped into the door, I had not paid my digestion visit of gratitude for the excellent dinner your father gave us, and so I took heart of grace."

"Fancy anyone being afraid of me, Monsieur—Mr. Odenried."

"I should judge you to be very severe."

"I should say you have had very little opportunity of judging of my character." This a little defiantly.

"Yet—think me impertinent if you will—I have judged it. There are things, you know, with which time has little to do. A moment is enough. An eternity would not suffice."

"You speak in riddles."

"Ah, well, perhaps."

"And when, pray, have you studied my character?"

"Why, at your table, and then the other day at——" He stopped and she did not encourage him. Tacitly they felt one name had better not be mentioned.

"I am sorry papa has gone to the city. I don't take visits all to myself. He likes people, neighbors to come, since I am here. I mean, he——" She was getting rather confused.

"He wishes you to be amused, not to die of boredom. He realizes what a change this must seem from your gay life abroad."

"Not at all; at the *château*, it is even quieter than here—no one, a desert. American women could not stand it."

"You make your own oasis." He glanced around at the room which her presence had filled with beauty and fragrance. There were flowers, an open piano, a breath as of music in the air. What a metamorphosis!

"Yes," she sighed, "a woman's hand was strangely needed. They were so alone, I felt it—pitiful!"

"You have a heart then, under your severity." Once more she grew cold. A silence palpitated between them for a moment.

"I hope I do not wear it on my sleeve, thanks," she said.

"Oh, so few have eyes to read hearts, even when they lie open. You need not fear. Sometimes it is they, the observers, that fear."

"Why, pray?"

"Do not ask?"

"So the Misses Horner give a party." She spoke in a tone as if one would say, "Enough! I don't care for your sentiments."

"Yes, the Misses Horner give a garden party."

"What enterprise! Are they marrying Miss Maria?"

"Why not? She is very gentle,

kind, and that is, no doubt, what men want."

"Insupportable man!" thought Bertha, and looked it. "I have never discovered what they wanted."

"They want—they want not to make mistakes."

"Ah! that is so difficult!"

"Yes, difficult, for it is our mistakes, not our crimes, that are punished with death."

"There are mistakes," said Bertha, very low and meaningly, "that are crimes."

"I believe you." She filled a rather awkward pause by ringing for tea. "Almeric," she said, "bring the kettle to the lawn. Set the table there, near the elm tree. We will come out; it is growing cool."

A trepidation among the birds came through the open windows, mingling with the phonetic plash of the waves. Their twitterings betrayed the nests

hidden under the scraggy willows on the beach.

"And what is to be done when one is in the meshes of a mistake that is also a crime?" He spoke in the same even voice, gazing now not at her, but beyond her.

She looked up at him and decided he was the most distinguished looking man she had ever seen. "Men are not troubled overmuch about such things," she said. "Their consciences are elastic. They find a way of escape where a woman perishes."

"You are right; the *bourgeois* nature escapes, but—ah, perhaps you think us all *bourgeois* here? You are half right. American chivalry is overrated. It is quite a thing of the past."

"I am told, in the gayest set here—the one in which you move, Mr. Odenried—that it is not the women, but the men, who have all the successes of vanity."

"Why ridicule me, Madame Le Moyne? I have not deserved it."

"I am ridiculing no one. I admire chivalry in a man. I adore it." Her voice sank to a deep contralto on the last word. There was the suggestiveness of a capability of emotion in her, which made her alluring under her poise of woman of the world.

"In what does your idea of chivalry consist?"

"Oh, it would not interest you?"

"Pardon me; strange as it may seem to you, it interests me."

"I like a man who would die for his friend, and I like a man who has honor even—even with a woman."

"And you think that Americans—I dare not say your compatriots, you see—are deficient in such courage and such steadfastness?"

"I said no such thing. I think there are such cases, men who lack this courage, everywhere." She blushed furi-

ously. He must be taught a lesson. She was Lollia's friend, yes, Lollia's. Her hands felt cold.

"You think, at all hazards, one should sacrifice everything, one's life, one's hopes, to a duty, to an honor possibly, even though it be itself made up of subterfuge and dishonesty. You are right. A man should never retreat. I *like* your severity." He leaned forward and looked into her face. His gray eyes held hers a moment, fascinated.

"It is a frightful hostage to give for a mistake!" she said, almost in a whisper. She trembled. Weak women must, before problems which sophists alone can answer. Had he looked less strong and proud, she would have pitied him less. Yes, she pitied him; pitied him more than she did Lollia, against whom she felt growing a violent irritation. She saw everything now, clearly, everything.

When they had gone out under the trees together they both breathed more

freely. He came back to her severity. "You treat me awfully, you know," he said, smiling. "You have done so from the very first—trampled upon me; and, do you believe it, I am so mean-spirited that I like it! There is something in it that invigorates."

She handed him a cup of tea. "I have been told that before—that I invigorate."

"Ah, I daresay."

He looked so dejected, twirling his spoon about, Bertha unbent a little. "I am sure, as—as—the friend of—of—I would be glad to serve you." But to this he made no reply.

"We grope in life," she continued, "surrounded by such strange pitfalls, our senses charmed by such false will-o'-the-wisps, our imaginations lured by such lying promises, even our reason is so wavering a guidance, that we ought not to refuse each other what little help we can." She spoke kindly. What was her amaze-

ment to see a tremor on the young man's usually cynical lips.

"Don't talk to me like that," he said, "I can't bear it."

"Very well," she answered quietly, "I will not." She began to speak of a new opera just given in Paris. "I hear it is very fine," she said. "My husband's people always were dragging me to the *bouffe*. How I hate it!"

"Really? Yet there are *bouffe* operas that are not all devoid of poetic sensation."

"Ah, that is a man's view," she said, laughing. "There are always the actresses to give him the poetic sensation."

"I have passed that period."

"Are you quite sure?" she asked archly.

"Quite. It was never accentuated in me. It is a theory that the *femme artiste* who is born of the people, cradled, as it were, in the humanities, with the later veneer which an enforced degree of edu-

cation and refinement gives, appeals imperiously to man's youthful ardors. But in the very slight and emphemeral relations I have had with the ladies of the *rampe* I always found they were more attracted by one of their own than by—me; and you see a boy's self love suffers. All they want of us is our ducats. We speak a different language. No, I remember giving a breakfast to two fair "variety" damsels once, with one of my college friends. We had expended ourselves on providing them with every delicacy out of the season, but they ordered sausage and tripe, and left us to devour the birds and *pâté*. And I regret to say that my especial fair one indulged, under my nose, in a hot flirtation with an Italian tenor, of greasy skin and black finger-nails, who cast amorous eyes upon her from a neighboring table."

"I can imagine," said Bertha lightly, "that common women would not like you very much."

Probably Geoffrey regretted his admission. It is just possible the Roman gentlemen were willing that the patrician ladies should sometimes have a twinge of jealousy of some pretty slave girl's dark eye.

"There is no doubt, however," he continued, "that when these women do love they do so more unselfishly than great ladies, only——"

"Oh, don't qualify," said Bertha, a little sarcastically. "I did not take you at your word." Another silence fell.

"You always remind me, do you know, Madame Le Moyne, of the Roman women of past days. There is something about you that suggests exquisite sybaritism. I can fancy you reclining on a divan, while one famed artist polished those long slender nails of yours, and another, of a little higher type, read aloud to you his last play or poem. What hours those fair dames expended in ornamenting their persons and their minds!

When a week's caprice you might have felt for a man was well over, you would signify your weariness in some proud fashion, by making him, perhaps, proconsul of a distant province."

"Ah, the Romans were a race of warriors!" said Bertha, smiling. "They craved the movement of warfare. The conquered province and the legion were dearer to them than their women's smiles."

"I don't know; their women were very clever, very captivating. Ah, those splendid, luxurious days! We have learned the trick of money getting—only another name for primeval man's cunning—but they knew how to spend it. What refinement, what splendor!"

"I don't believe in it a bit. Life repeats itself. *C'est toujours la même chose.* Why, Pliny tells us how troublesome his servants were, and how, at the feasts of the Saturnalia, he took refuge upon his grounds to avoid their noise. And he congratulates himself that there are baths

in the village, where his guests can be sent when it is too much trouble to heat water in the house. Depend upon it, there is a small side to things always."

"And the small side of things does not suit you! You would be impatient under it, even cruel. Would you have struck a slave, I wonder, that jostled too roughly your litter of ivory and gold?"

"I would not strike a slave," said Bertha faintly. "It is a coward's act. When I give such chastisements they are reserved for my equals." She threw back her head and looked at him again a little defiantly, but his eyes were on the ceiling. Defiance is an acknowledgment of weakness.

"There are sudden slaveries," he said very low, "born of what strange impulses, and mischances! Depend upon me, they are the real ones. They are not of caste or of birth, but of fate. Don't be too certain you would not strike a slave. If such a one were to throw at your

feet hopelessly, despairingly, impotently, madly, his whole existence, his whole honor, yet hardly daring to speak, to breathe in your presence, who knows? Perhaps you would trample upon him. I am not sure." He brought his eyes down to the level of hers. Through the persiflage a curious shiver shook them both.

"Mrs. Mount Cuthbert," announced the ever-officious Almeric.

Madame Le Moyne burst into a merry peal of laughter. "Why—why—Mrs. Mount Cuthbert, what have you got on?"

The lady's soft lips were concealed by a species of black tube, or rather pall, which also hid her small rosy chin. "It's nothing, it's only my respirator. It got entangled in my veil, and I was just trying to get the thing off when Almeric——"

"Your respirator?"

"Yes, for the dust. My lungs are all gone, as I told you. Ah, Mr. Oden-

ried!" The respirator was hurled to the floor with a jerk.

"Permit me." Odenried stooped and picked it up.

"Thanks. My new physician, a specialist, Dr. Lowrie—do you not know him? He has taken the world by storm—recommended this. You have no idea of the comfort. One breathes so easily. One feels like a disembodied spirit. Mr. Odenried, on your long cruises you should try one. At sea it is most efficacious. The mists inhaled are so destructive—I mean——"

"But," said Odenried, laughing, "my lung-power is not impaired. I——"

"Well, I don't know; I find you looking pale. Don't you think so, Madame Le Moyne—pale, rather drawn? But then, perhaps there are causes. You find it dull here now—that——" Odenried frowned, and the lady stopped. There was something portentous in the atmosphere.

She rattled on, quick to save herself. "I suppose you will be at the Horners' Tuesday. Fancy! a *fête* here, and at the dear, quiet ladies'! It is farcical. I tell Miss Maria it's prophetic. There must be a marriage in the air, something——"

They went out into the shade. Bertha looked for Odenried to depart. She wished that he would, but he did not. He stretched himself on a garden chair, his long legs to seaward, leaned his head back comfortably, and remained sitting there silent. On his lips was a smile, half amused, half contemptuous. "If you won't talk to us," she said to him impatiently, "smoke!" and she offered him a cigarette. He smoked.

His indolent indifference vexed Mrs. Mount Cuthbert, who was not entirely without insight. Small nightbirds see in the dark. Mr. Odenried's attitude toward herself had frequently piqued her before. It was all very well for a man to be wrapped up in one woman, but he

need not for this reason make a boor of himself to another. She imparted this opinion to Bertha, when finally Mr. Odenried had—after a half-hour—thrown away his cigarette and risen to depart. They watched his tall figure fade into dimness through the beach gate. The sun caught him a moment in its declining rays, where they touched the water into shifting fire. "It's all right, I suppose, his posing to be so dreadfully in love with Lollia—Mrs. St. Clair, I mean, but it is tiresome, you know, in the end."

"Ah!" said Madame Le Moyne.

"Such airs! I can't call them manners; and who is he, any way?" Mrs. Mount Cuthbert's English grew involved in her voice of anger.

Madame Le Moyne felt the question relevant. Who, what, indeed, could he be?

"It's absurd. He isn't even a New Yorker. No, only one generation; I am

told his grandfather hoed potatoes in Vermont."

"Potatoes?"

"Potatoes or egg-plant or something. Neither more nor less. The Odenrieds were nothing at all, nobodies; although of late they have started a family, and say they are descended from Swedish kings. Rot, of course—peasants probably. It is his mother who was well-born. She gave Odenried position—the father, I mean—he was clever, brilliant, they say. He came here, was successful, and she fell in love with him. She was a Vandenburg. They were proud people, her parents. They didn't like it. But he got so very rich, and was the fashion."

"Who?—the potato man?"

"Well, no; that was *his* father, Odenried's grandfather from nowhere at all, a small town up in Vermont! a place called 'Rackettsville.' Mount's great-aunt lived there once; she knew all about them. 'Rackettsville,' fancy!"

Bertha was conscious of a tight sensation at her heart. It turned leaden. "Rackettsville!" What could indeed come forth from Rackettsville, what? save dishonor, humiliation, death! Surely an angry angel stood at the portal of that evil place, waving off young women who did but yearn to read its legends, with sword of flame. And here this vile creature from Rackettsville had dared to cross her path, aye, not only to cross it but to linger in it, obstructing her way; had dared—scornful of his insufficient lineage—to have lips curved in mordant irony and eyes that flashed disdain. Could such things be? It was preposterous. The whole world seemed to tremble and turn over in a trance, to throb with wonderment. The stars grew black.

"Between us be it whispered," continued Mrs. Mount Cuthbert, "everyone here is saying over the roof-tops, yes, roof-tops, that the feeling—er—sentiment

we may call it, is all on one side—Lollia's." Rackettsville blew up and sank from sight in a flare of delight. Bertha's being seemed inundated with the surging torrent. Was it a destructive one? .Such currents can be made to turn windmills. Bertha hoped its dizzy swiftness boded no ill. She thought of the eye that offends and should be plucked out, the limb that halts and must be cut off. Yet surely no blunderer must do these things. Such operations can only be intrusted to skillful and patient surgery. Heroic treatment is not wise unless confided to an experienced hand. Bertha was dancing the sword dance, yet, womanlike, she shrank from wounding her tender feet.

"But I think he has behaved badly." Mrs. Mount Cuthbert was not to be bluffed. "Abominably! so selfish! Why, when I have girls with me at my place, and he the only man and desirable—called desirable—" Shades of Rackettsville shriveled into nothingness!—"one

never can get him. Always another engagement. In other words, 'can't' and 'won't.' So disagreeable, brusque, rude—morbid."

"Morbid!" Bertha felt the word was an inspiration. There was morbidity in the very light.

"Well, God only knows what will come of it, if he is sick of her——"

"Mrs. St. Clair," said Bertha haughtily, "is an old and intimate friend of mine. She has been most kind to me since my return. I should prefer not to discuss her."

"Why, of course; a lovely woman—growing a trifle stout perhaps—and such a prig for a husband! and that shocking, ill-conditioned Milly! One must not be too hard. I am very charitable. I take a wide view of these unfortunate entanglements. If she divorces—and I approve of divorce—it must exist in puritanical countries, if not, why people would just rise up and assassinate each other—it is

in the air now—who knows, perhaps Mr. Odenried——"

"Do you still talk of Europe for next summer?" said the marquise.

"Wouldn't it be too funny," thought Mrs. Mount Cuthbert, as she drove away, "if——"

She met Mr. Breckinridge and John at the gate. She stopped them for a parley. She told John he had grown uncommonly handsome. "I didn't know," he said to his sister afterward, "what was the matter with that woman. But after I had found out she was a fool, it explained a whole lot of things to me. When you once know, it is all easy." Bertha laughed; but did not feel quite certain that Mrs. Mount Cuthbert was a fool. John had brought her some *bonbons*, and an illustrated newspaper. He handed them to her stammering, awkward, like a school-boy in love. He was rather afraid of her; she seemed to him so fine and soft a creature. But she was growing

attached to him with a sort of pitying affection.

Geoffrey Odenried was just letting himself in at his low front door. A horrible sadness which he could not account for pinched his soul. He rang the bell and ordered a cocktail, the modern cure for the spleen. He had ordered several before he got through.

When Bertha opened her window at dawn, the next day, to woo unto herself the fresh morning air, after the restlessness of a hot, breathless night, she saw something dark and dewy lying on its sill. She stooped, curious, stretching out her hands. She touched the thing and was conscious of a lush, piercing odor which rose to her nostrils, and awoke her sleepy senses with keen pleasure. It was a great bunch of heliotrope, freshly culled. She played with the flowers for a moment, raising them to her face, and burying her smooth cheek in their honeyed fragrance. Then, with a frightened gesture and

ejaculation as if a sting had met the caress of her fingers, she tossed them angrily from her. They fell among some neighboring bushes. She returned into her room, closing her window after her with a quick jerk. A sea gull, driven from the shore on a wind gust, its round eyes blinded by the stinging spray, swooped with a swirl and scream against the closing pane.

CHAPTER XII.

THE Misses Horner had taken two years to suggest, plan, and carry out the reception which was to disturb the calm blessedness of their even existence. It was an upheaval. It had taken quite twelve months to decide if it should be called a reception or a garden party. A vote had been cast. One voice was for garden party, two for the less pretentious term, "afternoon reception." Therefore the latter was carried. People would expect less.

"I think garden party sounds prettier," said Miss Maria in expiring protest.

"Pshaw!" said Miss Jane. "I hate pretensions; leave them to the new-rich. Dear mamma liked things done with simplicity."

"It seems almost wrong," said Miss

Ann, "to throw the house open again." To this Miss Jane responded that gentle blood had its obligations. They owed civilities far and wide. The weight of unpaid courtesies weighed on her. Maria agreed. Maria was secretly enchanted; she liked company. The poor thing had never had—anything. But she was only half-conscious of the loss. Jane had had an offer. Ann had been in love with a vagabond cousin of hers, who had deserted her. But Maria had remained unchallenged and unwon. Yet her heart sometimes beat to bursting with its wealth of untried romance.

The mother, Mrs. Horner, had been a beauty in her youth, and there were traditions that her girlhood—which had been somewhat prolonged—had not been free from certain passages of coquetry. A little late she had bestowed herself upon the admiral, and had borne him, at discreet and ladylike intervals, his three daughters. Maria was considerably

younger than her sisters. In the world there were women of her age who still basked in the smile of admiration, were leaders, even belles, danced, flirted—think of it! But the great thing is to begin rightly. When Maria was born her parents were well on into middle life. When she grew up her mother was an invalid. She therefore folded her hands and joined her older sisters in sitting about the sick one's easy-chair; then, a few years more about her bed, until finally, having been so watched for ten years, the good lady died.

This family symposium is dispiriting to wooers. Wooers, never very numerous, had been quickly disheartened. At their mother's death the three Misses Horner lay on their faces and rent their garments. For the first time a real anguish had touched them. It was paralyzing, terrible.

The love of parents should be an affection, deep, sincere, ardent if you will, but free from morbid taint. When all

other channels have been stifled, this naturally sweet stream becomes sometimes a turbid flood. It has the exactingness, jealousy, one-idead tenacity of passion, without its light and warmth and color.

In America, where young people marry themselves or not at all, where the mother and father are on-lookers, not factors, in securing life partners for their offspring, we often see the anomaly of a monstrous selfishness growing up on the part of parents, of extraordinary sacrifice on the part of children. Youth and health and prospects are given up. Does it never occur to the parent who keeps her daughter at her bedside that her own life has been lived, that she has tasted joys which she is thus denying? However this may be, the late Mrs. Horner had sat contented, with her three girls, as she called them, about her, peevish if one went out of her sight for a half-hour, oblivious that their life was thus slipping on—unlived.

After her death her shadow had still lain

upon them. Her daughters emerged into the light of day, clad in raiment whose somberness clashed jarringly upon nature's beauty. Their mourning was no light panoply. It did not resemble Mrs. Mount Cuthbert's crape bonnet so jauntily adjusted upon soda-steeped tresses. It was a funereal pall, ponderous, uncompromising. They drew on black kid gloves to snip a rose of their garden. They came to their nine o'clock breakfast in high-necked, long-sleeved, Henrietta cloth gowns, with the thermometer at one hundred in the shade of an August morning. They wore black hats shrouded in thickest double English crape, to stand on the back terrace, at ten o'clock, and issue their orders to Hendrickson, the gardener.

And this livery of woe was worn for eight years, eight! pause and reflect on't; and it meant no visiting, no visitors, no music, little laughter. Is it a wonder that they spoke of the feat afterward with con-

siderable pride? We must all have our little conceits.

When they drove over in the close carriage, as befitted this official occasion, to condole with Mrs. Mount Cuthbert, after the death of her baby, and found her in a white mull wrapper, with only a wisp of black ribbon, and that watered—watered!—about her hips—they were dumb, speechless. They whispered about it together at home, sitting under their ivy-shrouded portico, breathless with reproach. There is the pleasant note, however, when one is not as others are. To dwell on the horrors of such heartless details has its spice, its tremor, its titillations.

When Maria emerged, after the eight years of seclusion and of gloom, youth had flown.

Then the widower came home, the admiral. The father, "retired." They at once sat down and began to watch him. This was shorter work. The retirement

had broken the old sailor's heart. It had broken it more effectually than his wife's death, more than the demise of all his children would have done. They looked at him for three years. He sank suddenly, one morning, and escaped their vigilance, sitting in his armchair, with his face to the sea.

They came forth from this second bereavement, after five more years—the period of confinement was abridged this time—Ann revolted—practically speaking, old women.

And the world is wide, full of poetry, of greatness, of splendor, full of interest, of strange peoples and tongues and countries, of deeds to be done and difficulties to be conquered, full of profound romance, of great experiences, of vast import, of large knowledge. But of all these things the Misses Horner knew nothing, and for all these things they cared nothing. Well, perhaps Maria would have cared, but she was a

poltroon. She did not dare gainsay her iron sisters. Characters with no revolt in them are a curious study; treadmill spirits that never see the stars, whose whole prowess consists in eternal imitation; fruitless, flowerless, flaccid growths.

The three ladies sank into an elegant materialism—they would have cried out against what is called "worldliness." They were only earthy. They gathered golden husks and ate them—golden, yet husks. Sometimes the handle came off their grandmother's teapot—a way it had. Teapots have their idiosyncrasies. It must be mended; this necessitated a trip into the city. No one could be trusted to bear this priceless heirloom, this oriflamme, but one of its owners.

Then there was the furnace. It was astonishing how careless the maids were. After Haines, the man, had piled up the coal Bridget *would* forget to open the damper. She had been severely re-

buked, threatened with dismissal. Jane undertook it. At twelve precisely she tapped on the hall register with her slipper, and she continued to tap until Bridget responded, rattling at the pipes. This was done daily through the whole winter. If Miss Jane had to go to town for a funeral, shopping, or the dentist, Ann took her place. At twelve o'clock precisely there was this mysterious communication with the under-world. In this way the thermometer in the drawing room never rose above sixty-eight. They were given to headaches, the Misses Horner. They lived well, they had excellent appetites, took no exercise. There were days when they suffered from the heat. At half-past nine Miss Jane read prayers in the library. This was prefaced with a chapter of the Bible. Jane read glibly, with little emphasis, as a matter of course, one eye on the door, to see the draught was not on Ann's shoulder—Ann was rheumatic—another

on the fire, to be sure that no sparks flew. Once she astonished her sisters by saying afterward, as they went up to their virginal couches, "Well, I declare, I don't see any sense in that chapter I read to-day."

"Sister!" cried the others aghast.

"No, I don't. It does seem to me as if it contradicts itself every other word. The Bible is queer."

"Why, sister!"

"Good-night," said Jane shortly, and closed her door. She left the others greatly flustered. This blasphemy was an event.

Although they had invited the neighborhood to a "reception," it got about that it was a "garden *fête*." The Misses Horner heard this with chagrin. It seemed to them important and unfortunate. "Just think, Sister Ann," said Maria, "Mrs. Mount Cuthbert called out to me and asked if she might bring her guests to our—*fête!*"

"I hope you corrected her and said 'reception,'" said Miss Ann.

"Yes, I did, and she wouldn't listen; she just drove off." There was a pause; Jane was ruminating.

"Ann," she said after a while, "Ann, tea and cake won't do; there has got to be music and ices and a marquee."

"Heavens!" said the others.

"When papa and mamma did a thing," said Miss Jane, "they didn't do it meanly. The neighborhood has made up its mind to a *fête*. I don't see what we are going to do."

"I don't see what we are to do," echoed the Misses Ann and Maria.

"I'll just tell you what," said Jane, who was executive, "we'll write to Hurry, and tell him to undertake the whole affair, marquee, waiters, music, everything." Hurry was a celebrated city caterer who had lately become the mode.

"Why, sister!"

"It will be Maria's coming-out party." Jane smiled. "She never had any."

"Do you remember the pink silks we wore at mine?" asked Ann. She covered her nose and one eye with her thin hand, and lay back in her chair and laughed. "What guys we'd look in them now! What odd fashions then, with those leg-of-mutton sleeves and wide flounces!"

"Why, those queer sleeves are coming in again."

"Didn't you notice Lollia's on Sunday?"

"No!"

"Well, Maria," said Miss Jane, "we'll have you in pink silk for the *fête;* you have never had a chance."

"Yes, it's Maria coming-out party," said Miss Ann, "and we won't stint expense." They all laughed their little, apologetic, high-bred, half-sad laughter, under protest, a little timidly, as if they feared this levity was carrying them away into

forgetting their age, their dignity, and their sorrows. But somehow, when they had done, there were tears in Miss Maria's kindly brown eyes. She rose hurriedly, and went into the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE cocktails had not dissipated Odenried's depression. He should have tried Mr. Breckinridge's new methods of temperance. Poor Adrian in these days drowned his griefs in Apollinaris; what oceans of the appeasing fluid he consumed! A fleet might have been floated upon the generous flood.

The depression had held him all of the night. It met him grimly, jailer-like, when the sun rose over the woodland stretches. He got up, threw on some clothes, and wandered to the beach. He would take a swim. On his way he smelt the heliotrope. He pulled a bunch, tied it together himself with a bit of lute-string found upon his library table, and turned his steps toward Breckinridge

House. He knew *her* room. He thought of her lying on her pillows, as a prisoner thinks of light and liberty and air, and as he laid the flowers at her window-sill, he thought of her mouth, that rose of love with its half-blown petals. Ah, to drink of the breath of that unopened flower! "God bless her!" he thought; "she hates me, but perhaps she will forgive this. I can't help myself. She looks magnanimous." But magnanimity is not forgiveness. How would he have explained this matutinal *démarche* to Lollia? Lollia, who had not the calm of the woman who knows herself adored? Would the "I just stopped with some flowers on my way to the beach, etc.," have satisfied her? Those glib subterfuges of the male, thrown out as sops to female credulity, which women force themselves to accept. Do such words ever satisfy a loving woman, however she try to deceive herself? Only vanity is so appeased. And love kills

vanity. Well, he did not care. A man's jealousy sometimes attaches a woman, in that it flatters her; a woman's jealousy always detaches a man. How weary he was of her constant reproaches! Sometimes she accused him of falseness. Yet his was not a false character. He had only that form of secretiveness which takes the place of craftiness. There are people who think to spill one's life-blood in public indelicate. Bertha would have suited him in this. The feminine note in his nature understood hers. It is the note which gives certain men genius in loving. When he had thrown his poor flowers at Bertha Le Moyne's feet, so to speak, he had been filled, like a boy, with a sort of speechless glee. If she slighted the gift, what mattered it? Slights are all the same; they must come to all. The degree of their suffering is only the degree of our self-love. Odenried was not a vain man, he was too clever. Pride alone stoops.

And now all pride, all self-appreciation, was swallowed up on this relentless, unswerving tide. It had swept him from his foot-hold. He was helpless, struggling, drifting.

In the afternoon he remembered, after he had moored the *Baby*, back from a morning's scorching on the Sound, that the Horner *fête* was at five o'clock; the garden party whose lures he had repudiated to Lollia, sitting on her piazza, under the vine-leaves. But now he rang for his man and ordered his horse, King Harry, and got himself into his riding boots and breeches. "I will ride that way," he thought. "I may at least see her." The woods through which he went were like cathedral aisles full of shadows, inviting to serene reveries. But in the man's brain was no serenity, only unrest, discord, ferment, impatience. "What an idiot I have been!" he thought. "God! what fools we are, what tricksters with fate, which laughs and

plays to our own tune, then turns to avenge and torture!"

The sound of the breeze in the tree-tops had the majesty of a benediction; but it brought no magic to soothe a tired fancy. A whole orchestra of melody filled the harmonious silences, rising and falling like gigantic scales, endlessly begun, never ending, unfinished, leaving in his unhappy heart an unsatisfied desire and pain.

By and by he drew up at the Horners' gate. He threw his reins to a groom who stood near, and crossed the lawn. Two coaches had just arrived. They had come many miles with their freight of beauty, across the plains. There were the little shrill cries of the women being lifted down the steep iron ladders on which their slender feet rested but lightly. One caught a rapid sight of a bronzed shoe, with its gilt-tipped heel, of a graceful leg incased in a dark silk stocking. There were the

Heathcotes, who had driven all the way over from East Brompton—Antoinette queenly, gracious, beautiful, surrounded as ever by her adorers with the repose of one who has everything to accord, nothing to obtain, in that atmosphere of homage which suited her so well; and with them the Jack Greshams—Constance tall and *svelte* in her white cloth costume, brightened here and there with gold: with the old hidden mystery of her smile, and the same weariness of her cold, proud eyes. Then there is the brilliant young Countess of Brownlow—she who was Muriel Hatch—the Milburn Maurys, and their cousin, Mr. Milburn, lately returned from his foreign mission; and Singleton Ackley with his *monocle*, his white waistcoat, his gold-headed cane, and his gardenia flower. At the foot of the lawn there is a commotion and the blowing of a steam-whistle, the flaunting of flags, of pennons and ribbons. The *Elaine* casts anchor, and pretty Mrs.

Eustis, Mrs. Horace Eustis, trips across the floating wharf with her friend Mrs. Ayrault and some gentlemen. She is swathed in an odd-shaped, long, quaintly embroidered rose-colored cloak, from which one of the men is extricating her slight figure with gallant assiduity. Behind Mrs. Ayrault comes the Comte de Beaumont, who follows the handsome *divorcée* with eyes filled with a hopeless devotion. Their voices float gayly up and mingle with the band music which plays under the marquee. The Misses Larned have captured Tad Nailer, an infantile freshman who is stopping at their house for the occasion, but who on seeing the Heathcote coach becomes frantically restless, and kicks in his traces. He is too good-natured, however, to bolt and run, as he fain would do.

The tables are set on the lawn in the shade. Ices, fruits, cold dishes of every sort, bouillon, tea, punch, and champagne; all is well done, nay, regally; nothing is

stinted. The old oaks seem to tingle with these new juices of hospitality, running freshness into their decaying sap.

The three Misses Horner are standing in a row under the big elm tree. They receive with dignity, with no undue elation or excitement of manner, albeit their thin hands tremble under their long *suède* gloves, their pallid, wrinkled faces are flushed at the cheek bone into an intensity of color. Miss Maria, almost pretty, almost young again in her gray silk and white lace collarette. Gentlewomen unmistakably, even amid the flutter of fashion and of modernity, which caprice has brought to preen its plumage for an hour in this quiet retreat of bygone days.

As Odenried swings up the path he sees her whom he came to see, her alone and none other—Bertha Le Moyne, in her delicate mauve gown and frail laces, a little pale under her lace parasol, sitting on a low garden-seat. And he sees that

she is unquestioned queen of the feast this day. Mrs. Heathcote, who knew her in Paris, comes forward swiftly with words of gracious welcoming. Mrs. Jack Gresham, who met her in Rome, murmurs with her greeting an invitation to "Sea-Mew." Singleton Ackley hurries to her side; while Tad longs to rid himself of his captors, and to beg for an introduction.

"Just see Mr. Nailer glaring at the Marquise Le Moyne!" says Mary Larned. "Why, it is downright rude to us!"

"I—er—think she is awfully pretty, you know, immense!" lisps out the shy collegian, "awfully pretty, and all that sort of thing! But there's no hurry, you know. I'll see her later, when the feed comes on." Just then some native youths come to his rescue, and he makes a leap to Mrs. Heathcote's side. "Introduce me to the marquise; now do, dear Mrs. Heathcote, you are so jolly kind to me always."

Mrs. Heathcote smiles indulgently. "Ah, Tad, burning your fingers again, I see! Well, well, it is a widow this time; there's more chance for you." And she confides him to Mr. Ackley's piloting.

"How you go on; why, you know I have had only one passion, one hopeless one all my life—for you, my sovereign lady."

Mrs. Eustis, daintily picturesque, in her broad feathered hat, shading her crown of gray-black hair, comes forward and claims acquaintance with the stranger. "I don't know," she murmurs in a half timid voice, "if I may venture, Madame Le Moyne, to recall myself to you, but we met at Mrs. Heathcote's in Paris, at a ball, five years ago." She blushes.

"How could one forget your face?" says Bertha. "It is not like another's: and then your gown that night, I have remembered it always, it was so original, charming." They shake hands, they speak together a few moments. Madame

Le Moyne half promises to sail over to "Liesse" for a day or two. "We'll send the *Elaine* if you like," says Norah Eustis. "It's but a short voyage by sea."

Just then Odenried comes up. His tall shadow falls between the women. Mrs. Eustis glances up shyly at him. He takes off his hat. Madame Le Moyne meets his bow glacially, with a half frown above her eyelids. She wears some white roses at her bosom. White roses—the man marks it. His flowers then were rejected, unwelcome, and he feels again that tightening at the heart which hardly leaves him of late, and which is entirely unknown to his past experience. Yet he speaks to her. "You are the cynosure of all eyes here, to-day. I must not stand before you a moment, lest others should lose the enchanting vision."

Madame Le Moyne is indeed very lovely, with a disturbing loveliness.

"Ah! A new face, nothing more."

"A novelty, you think, sways the imagination?"

"Why—yes, naturally."

"Yet there are persons we meet that seem not new to us; they are a fulfillment, as it were. It is as if one had never seen before, and suddenly one's eyes were opened, one is powerless, possessed, one has to follow the light."

"I do not doubt you could furnish many examples of such phenomena, but my experiences are more limited, believe me." She speaks a little dryly.

"One such is enough," he answers with a short, harsh laugh, as she turns away from him now resolutely, lowering her parasol before her face with a gesture of dismissal. But as she looks up smilingly at Tad, who is propelled forward by Singleton Ackley, Odenried notices that the hand which clasps its handle shakes, as if it would release a nervous hold. Deeply hurt, he moves away, and having mingled with the crowd for a moment

only, he departs abruptly without taking leave. At the gate he mounts his horse, and gallops off through the pasture lots and so toward the more distant plains.

When Madame Le Moyne raises her sunshade and sees the horseman disappearing across the highway, into the meadows, some measure of the unexplained anguish which has filled his soul touches hers. "I have insulted him," she thinks, "but so be it!" And she does not say, "God help him!" but "God help me!"

"Life," she ponders dreamily, as she replies to Tad's inane, pleasant prattle, "life is not ours. Circumstances, habits, memories enlace us in bonds we dare not destroy." The thought of an old woman, of a young child, and then of one—but no—of Lollia she would not think. "I have been loyal," she said to herself bitterly.

"What did you say, Madame Le

Moyne?" asks Tad, leaning to her, "did you speak to me?"

"Let us join the others," she says hurriedly, and with an access of gayety, "come! They are dancing in the Umbra. It is the Virginia reel, I think, Mr. Nailer. Let me prove that I have not forgotten it." In a moment they have mingled with the dancers. Tad is proud of his success with the fair stranger. The Umbra is a wide, inclosed piazza, which looks to seaward. It has been cleared for the occasion, and its floor is waxed and highly polished. The musicians have been moved now nearer to the house. They have just struck up the Sir Roger De Coverley. To everyone's amusement Mr. Breckinridge drops suddenly, as from the skies, springs up the stoop and offers his hand gallantly to Miss Maria Horner. She flushes with pleasure. They dance with spirit, starting off with old-fashioned pirouetting, bows, courtesies, and pigeon wings. The

young people titter with merriment, the older ones join in the laughter. Everyone is put upon an easy footing. The stately *fête*, which had threatened stiffness, becomes a frolic. It lasts late. "It's just been too lovely!" gurgles Clara Larned, saying her farewells. She is all white dotted muslin and blue sash, like a pin-cushion at a country fair.

"A wild success!" cries out Mrs. Mount Cuthbert, flourishing her whip over the heads of her prancing ponies.

Odenried, riding furiously over the distant plains, has accepted a fiat he understands but too well. Madly he rides to still a resentment, a humiliation, which sting his manhood and cover him with a hot shame.

That evening Mrs. Mount Cuthbert writes to Mrs. St. Clair. She describes the *fête*, the coaches, the yachts, the gowns, the dance.

Then, in a postscript, "I asked your

address of Mr. Odenried, and he didn't seem to know it, or else he wouldn't tell me, so I take my chances of being right. I think you said the 'Saranac' until next week. I only saw him for a moment. He was talking to Madame Le Moyne. By the way, she looked exquisitely, was quite the belle of the occasion—took the wind out of all our sails. She is charming."

CHAPTER XIV.

ODENRIED, in crossing the city, stopped at one of his clubs. He had been off for a few days' fishing. The sport had been excellent, and his own exploits dazzling; but he had been dissatisfied, in fact, profoundly bored. He had grown as tired of the solitariness of the days, as of the enforced companionship of the evenings and nights. The talk of the party, some of them men much younger than himself, was irritating. He concluded that he must be getting old and morose. When he left them late, to seek his bed, it was with that sense of degradation that a silly, bantering joviality, in which one has taken unwilling part, impresses upon large natures in certain moods. He had brought no light weapons to the fray of jollity and fun. He was

like one of those ancient vikings who struck at their antagonists with short, blunt swords. The men had chaffed him for not being in "good form," and he had retaliated crossly, and had made short work of their raillery. He was returning to his place with a curious desire to be there once again, and a serious conviction that he had best turn his back to it. But man's desire is conqueror; nature has so willed. In his brain a persistent thought was beating its pulses. His mind was full of hesitancy and tormented with doubt. At his club he found a telegram from Mr. Cranston. It informed him that the *Lark*, on which he had expected to make the homeward trip, had met with a slight accident and was "up" for repairs. He had just time to hail a cab and be driven to the ferry to catch the regular passenger and freight steamer which plowed up the Sound every summer afternoon. When he reached the dock the *Montezuma* was already at her pier.

The plank trembled as he stepped across it. They waited for him a moment and pulled it up after him with a jerk. He gave a smiling salute to Mr. Breckinridge, *père*, whose rotund visage was just visible above the upper deck railing. "I'll be up in a minute," he cried out to him. "Keep a seat for me."

The boat was somewhat crowded. A wedding party of Irish people were waving their adieux to some of their friends, who were noisily demonstrative on the dock. A "Wish you joy!" was thrown across the paddle wheel to the bride, a bright-eyed young woman, dressed in a blue cashmere frock and yellow hat. She called out, "Oh, get out!" and giggled coyly.

Then the bridegroom said something unintelligible, and winked at his wife. It was evidently thought to be extremely humorous, being met with a shout of hilarity. A Roman Catholic priest, who seemed to be of the returning party, and

presumably had tied the knot, raised his hand as if in blessing, and said, "Good-by, my children!" He then, with the bride and groom, and two or three of their friends, ascended the narrow stairs of the cabin. There were few if any ladies on board, but there were a good many villagers, and some farmers' wives coming home from a day's shopping; and Odenried recognized half a dozen or more men he knew.

Mr. Breckinridge, who, as I have said before, rarely went into the city, when he did so usually returned in the boat. He had his own stateroom on board, where he retired to play cards with such acquaintances as he could impress into the service. He now asked Odenried to take a hand, but the latter expressed his preference for the open air.

The afternoon was threatening. The atmosphere was oppressive, the sky lowering and dark. There were swelling clouds at almost every point of the hori-

zon. Their form was ominous. Odenried met the captain amidships. He seemed in a hurry, and spoke of the weather. "A dirty sky, sir," he said. A bank of vapors seemed approaching from west and east, as if to engulf the breezes which blew against them.

When they had steamed about a mile, Odenried, looking up from his evening paper and throwing away his cigar, was struck by the strange appearance of things. The heavens were growing densely black. Distant gleams of electric fire fretted his eyes. He put down the paper and, with his hands in his pockets, began to pace such a strip of deck as remained unencumbered by the camp stools of the passengers. He stopped for a moment to speak to Mr. Goodman, the Presbyterian clergyman of Hornersville. He was an old man, and was laden with parcels.

"I am carrying home some toys and candy for my daughter's little ones," he said. "There is a birthday to-morrow."

Odenried remembered that there had been some talk of removing him, that the people were getting tired of him and of his preaching. There was a young element of discontent springing up in the parish. He only knew these things vaguely, not being one of Mr. Goodman's flock, as we know things we hear unconsciously and without interest. He noticed that the hand that held the candy-bag trembled. It was just a little palsied, and looking into the old gentleman's pale, sad face, he found himself pitying him. He remembered, as I say, what he had heard, and so spoke a casual friendly word to his neighbor. Mr. Goodman felt pleased and flattered that this strong, elegant fellow should notice him at all. Even an old-fashioned Presbyterian divine may have his little vanities.

They looked down at the water. There was a gray, oily skin upon it like an animal's hide. Now and then this skin rose and wrinkled itself, heavy, leprous.

Odenried walked up and down several times; when a sudden light overhead brightened the atmosphere, he drew a half-finished novel from his pocket, and sat down to read. A pretty young girl who tilted herself back upon a stool quite close to him, and who wore a wide white hat, took an eager interest in the reader. She thought he looked young to have gray hair; she thought him handsome. She was going up, under the care of her maid, to pass a night with the Eustises at Liesse. She wondered if he was to be one of the party. He looked as if he might be a friend of Mrs. Eustis'. She did not know people much yet; she was only a schoolgirl, sixteen last week.

Suddenly the wind took her red-gold hair, and whisked it against her cheeks. She was obliged to rise and settle her skirts, and to raise her hand to the brim of her big hat.

The ship rocked, struck by the sea. An impetuous rush of waves rolled under

it. It began to dance frightfully. The storm had declared itself. Odenried looked up, turned up his collar, and continued to read. The wind made curious sounds: sometimes it was like the cheery cackle of old wives over their pipes, and again it had a minor note like a soul in travail. The somber heavens were now and then riven by flashes of lightning. As yet there was no thunder. Odenried threw away his novel, which was not an amusing one, and leaned over to watch the water. Yes, there were strange sounds in the air, prolonged, obstinate, the cry of the tempest. It had come, bemoaning itself—the hoarse voices of the powers of nature, lisping their first inarticulate words, trying to make themselves understood—a language at once terrible and confused, as if space were laying its case before an angry judge, arguing, justifying itself. Those sobs, those plaints, those reproaches, whence are they, what mean they? Whom do

they upbraid! To whom do they pray? What do they seek? Winds plead with waves; waters call to sky—the loquacity of the depths. Is it a caprice? Does such a thing as caprice exist?

Now came thunder, loud, distinct, disturbing. Faster and faster the flashes of light, darker and darker the intervening moments. The *Montezuma* kept on her course, riding the waves. Sometimes they crept under, and now sometimes over her, but she was a staunch little thing. She leaned heavily to one side, but she resisted. The crew were busy; order followed order. The "ay, ay!" of the sailor was swallowed and absorbed by the menaces of gusts—no longer menaces now, declared warfare. The women had risen, alarmed. The seats they had occupied slipped from side to side, pell-mell, lying in heaps. The passengers in dismay, hurrying, fell over them. The deck steward came out and raked them up, piling them against the funnel.

At the "Stepping-stones" a Norwegian bark, the *Aase*, fleeing before the storm, signaled; a signal of distress. She had somehow sprung a leak, overweighted, she was sinking. The *Montezuma* trembled. Should she stop and give help or disdainfully pass by? Fate decided. It was at this moment that the lightning struck her. The newspapers of the day are kept on file; he who runs may read. There was a low, rumbling sound, then an explosion. The paddlewheel stopped. Then the cry of "Fire!" and a bell sounded; a knell. She became the toy of the storm. The frightened women came back to the deck. Odenried felt two slender arms tightly fastened about his throat. "Save me! Save me!" It was the young girl who had watched him reading.

"Yes, my child," he said to her, "be quiet." All was wild confusion; smoke was everywhere. Odenried saw Mr. Goodman where he had fallen on his face. He

looked as if he was in an aureole of flame. The lightning had struck him dead. He would weary his congregation no more. Odenried's hands were still numb from the electric shock. He disengaged the girl's clinging fingers, and almost carried her to the lifeboat, which was being lowered.

"I'll shoot the first damned cur of you who gets into the boat before the women's safe!" roared the first mate. He stood at the head of the broad stairs, with his thumb on the trigger of his revolver. A group of terrified women, and some men with pallid face, had surrounded the priest, and were crowding about him. "Father Matthews," they cried, "give us the blessing!" He ordered them to prosternate themselves. The deck was beginning to grow hot. Here and there the planks were cracking. Some vapor and sparks flew upward between them. "My children," he said, "cast yourselves upon God's mercy. Repent of your sins, repent!" He was very calm. His homely

common features were transfigured. Then from one to another he stepped swiftly, hearing confessions. One man kept him long. His sins were heavy—pride, covetousness, luxury, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth—too many, too many, and only this moment to tell them all!

"Hurry up, ye!" said an old Irishwoman, who still clutched her market basket with her rough red hands. "Ye wouldn't damn all our souls, would ye? Do ye want us all to be lost for ye?"

Father Matthews rebuked her, "Patience, my daughter!" The haggard group gained dignity in its attitude of humility and renouncement. The lifeboats were almost forgotten. A dearer life was in jeopardy—the life of the spirit. The infinite had spoken to the immortal.

"Pater noster, qui es in cœlis," said the priest.

They all joined in.

"O clemens, O pia! O dulcis Virgo Maria! Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Geni-

trix! Ad te suspirantes, gementes et flentes."

Odenried had never flagged. He had done a giant's work. He had assisted the women into the boats, seen that these were manned, given out life-preservers, spoken words of encouragement.

But already many had gone to their doom. Some had perished from the shock of the first lightning-stroke; others had been injured in the explosion. What was it? Impossible to tell, to investigate, in the general gloom and darkness. There were groans issuing from the cabin. The *Montezuma* was on fire. At her bows she was now a mass of flame. The good swimmers had jumped overboard, and were bravely making their two miles toward the Long Island shore. Much exhausted, his hands scorched, his clothes torn and disordered, Odenried prepared to swim for his life. He could do no more. He was cut off from the rest of the people now

by the hot, whirling smoke. As he seized the railing to spring overboard, he saw Mr. Breckinridge just below him, fastening a life-preserver about his loins. The old Irishwoman, who had been so fearful of eternal damnation, emerged at this moment from the cabin door-way. "Sir," she said, "save a poor old woman, and the Lord have mercy on your soul!" She was weeping loudly, wringing her hands, invoking all the saints to come to her rescue.

This particularly earthly saint lurched out of his life preserver, and had quickly tied it about the woman's middle. "Here," he said, "that's all I can do for you, my good woman. I'm no swimmer."

The deck was burning his feet. He crawled outside the paddle box and hung there, holding himself by one hand. In a moment Odenried was under the wheel. "Mr. Breckinridge," he called out, "drop down, I'll tow you!"

Mr. Breckinridge smiled grimly. "I

weigh two hundred and sixty pounds, and I can't swim a stroke. Save yourself, my boy, and leave my old carcass to the crows!"

"If you don't do as I command you," ordered Odenried, "I'll come up there and *drag* you down. Do you hear me?" Mr. Breckinridge turned to look at him; in so doing he lost his balance. He fell into the water. He sank out of sight. In a moment his round head came up three feet from Odenried's left arm.

"Now then!" Geoffrey never knew how he did it, exhausted as he was already; but strength was given him, the feat was accomplished. He swam to shore with his burden. Fortunately the burden had some common sense; he did not struggle. He had some common sense, and then he was *her* father.

It was several hours afterward that, covered with blankets, imbibing comfortable libations of whisky and water, and holding his daughter's hand, Mr.

Breckinridge told of his miraculous escape, and of Odenried's gallantry. "Betty," he said to her, stroking her pretty hair affectionately, "Betty, you have made a better man of your father, my dear, and so Providence didn't let him drown like a rat. You must go over to-morrow, and thank that sturdy fellow for saving your papa's useless life."

"Oh, dear, dear, dearest papa!" sobbed Madame Le Moyne. "And does it count for nothing that you gave your life-preserver to another? I love you! Think how dreadful it would have been!" Was the thought of the rescuer, by any possibility, an inspiration to the ardent and passionate caresses that the young woman lavished so generously upon her parent? If this is so, it is not for us to determine. She would have been the first to indignantly repudiate the supposition.

Voices in the hall startled her from her kneeling posture at Mr. Breckinridge's

bedside. The storm had spent itself, the heavens were now almost cloudless. The elements were silenced. She heard the voice of Odenried's man-servant in the hall. There was a word about port wine. Then Almeric answered, "Directly." Bertha, leaving Almeric's wife in charge of her father, who was sinking into sleep, came out into the antechamber. "What is it?" she asked.

"Mass' Odenried's had a chill, miss," said Almeric. "His port wine's out, and Alfred came over to get some of ourn." He held a decanter in his hand. "Give it to me," said Madame Le Moyne. "I will take it." The men fell back surprised. She found a long black satin cloak of hers, which had been thrown upon a seat, wrapped herself in its folds, drew its hood over her head, and so emerged, with the flask of wine in her hand, alone into the moonlit night.

CHAPTER XV.

SHE stood on his threshold. He was sitting, or rather crouching, before a fire whose jets illumined his tall, bent figure. A covert coat was thrown across his shoulders; he held it together about his throat with one hand. His hair seemed to be still damp from its contact with the sea. It clung to his temples in little dark rings. There was something imposing in his attitude and his solitariness. The room was dark, except for the fitful flicker of the fire and for a radiant moon which hung in the window pane, flooding the apartment from floor to ceiling. It drew strange traceries of cold light and weird shadow upon the floor and the yellow damask furniture.

At the sound of her footstep he

turned; he looked up dazed a moment. She noticed that his face was deathly pale. He sprang to his feet, jerking the coat from his shoulders. It fell to the floor.

She hesitated, and wavered a moment on the threshold. "I have brought you the wine," she said. "I have come to thank you."

He said something which she did not understand, still standing as if paralyzed, watching her fingers, as she took up a glass which stood upon a salver on the table, and poured the rich red liquor quickly into it.

In a moment she was at his side. "Here, drink," she said peremptorily.

He stooped and took the proffered beverage, raised it to his lips, quaffed it, and then, still as one in a dream, "Ah, I thought you would come to me," he murmured, "queen of my soul!"

"Yes," she said, as if not heeding his words, "I have come."

'You see it was useless for me to struggle," he continued. "From the first I knew that I was yours. See, the wine you have brought me is in my veins; the death chill that held me is over. Madame Le Moyne, the fever of life has come to me again, the fever that has consumed me for the last weeks. Yet it is but prosaic truth I utter when I tell you I wished to die to save you a minute's pain; but fate was unkind to me."

"Oh!" she said.

"Yes, to us, *dear*. You see, I needs must feel that the worship that I give you, has for an hour, at least, made our souls one. I sometimes think you must have seen it all on that first night. But it awoke so strong and fierce it would have frightened you. I knew that my soul had found its master in a tenderness illimitable. Ah, from the first I saw you as you are—angel and goddess! There is no act of self-repression, of self-immolation man might not commit for you—no

fond and foolish thing one has read of but scarce believed. You bring enchanting, elevating thought; why, you fill with joy the whole horizon of the world. Until I met you I did not live, I slept. But now I am awake. Yet I love you, you see; and so I crave you as man, as lover craves woman, with ardor and with yearning, yearning that even you could never slake. Is it not thus, Bertha, that you want to be loved, tell me, *dearest?* I sometimes wondered, this long summer, when men and women tried to lure me away from the old house and its solitude, why I shook my head, and wouldn't follow them. But to-night I know. I would like to whisper it in your little ear. I have so much to say to you, but I shall say nothing, beloved. No, I would not dare. All I would dare is to fall at your feet so—looking up—mayhap you would be kind. I might catch the murmur of your low voice, listen to its music, and see love shape himself on your sweet lip."

Bertha stood motionless, clasping and unclasping her hands, her bosom tossed with sighs. In her whiteness she looked like a vision from some other world. She tried to speak, she tried to flee, but could not. Only, on her face a strange glow was growing, growing up from her mouth, irradiating her low, broad, moon-touched forehead.

"You saw it, did you not, darling?—the very first time? You knew that never before had I caught sight even of love's fluttering garment. Why, it must have been so plain to your deep heart. If you doubted it, it would have been calumny, not to me but to yourself—your loveliness. You knew from that hour that all else, all else, all others—do you hear?—were chaff borne on the winds, froth lashed away to nothingness on the first breaker of a fathomless sea."

He came forward and took her hands into his poor scorched and blackened ones. She gave them to him proudly,

gazing into his eyes, and hers were full of an ineffable rejoicing. "Yes," she murmured, "I knew."

"There, so!—look up, my empress. I shall not harm you. I have so many things to tell you, Bertha. Will you listen? I longed to-day to die for you—for yours. What did life hold for me? Ah, well I know it might hold a delight that words are vain to paint, but I feel that you will not give it me. And, in fact, I am unworthy. Tell me, Bertha, is there no hope?"

"Speak to me so, again!" she gasped, sighing.

"Speak to you? What else have I done—what else? My very heart-beats, my pulse's lightest throb have been all yours. Put your hand on my heart, feel how it beats to bursting now! How curious these things are, Bertha! You flouted, you would have none of me. You condemned, despised, rejected me. Ah, you were doubtless right! It was

not worth while. It was a terrible net. Yet here you are, and here am I! And the fates snap their fingers at the world, and the moon—depend upon it, she's a good counselor—says, 'You are both young still, since you can feel, and free still, since you can love; for love is youth and love is liberty. Take what love holds, take it!"

"Speak to me, more, more!"

"Speak to thee, *bien-aimée*, and what shall I tell thee? Is it of thy beauty that I shall speak—of thy lips and eyes, of the fragrant soles of thy beautiful feet, of the perfumed splendors of thy dark hair? Don't withdraw your hands, Bertha, those ardent hands, so dear! I *knew* that they were ardent, let me still hold and cherish them." So he still held her helpless, speechless, but he did not draw her nearer to his breast. "Yes, we have struggled—but you see it was idle—come! Why would you leave me?" He laughed. "Are you afraid of me?"

he said, "dear little one? Have no fears, no terrors—only come."

There was a round high seat in the center of the dim apartment, covered with some antique tapestry, armless, quaint, with gilded, carved feet, that bore the heads of griffins. It stood alone, like the deserted pedestal of some lost sovereignty. Hither he guided her. "Step up upon this throne," he said to her, but she demurred.

"Do what I tell you!" but she still hesitated.

"I order you," he said sternly, "to do my bidding. I am master here," and then she obeyed, trembling, as one in a trance. He supported her swaying figure for an instant against his arm; then dropped her hands and drew away. She stood thus isolated upon the dais, whose lower half was drowned in darkness. Her lips alone were touched by the moonbeams. Her hair was still in gloom. The man moved slowly about

the room, but from her face and form he did not take his eyes—not once. First from this vantage-ground, and then from that, he gazed and gazed, as if he would stamp on the retina of his eye the envelope of his brain, the palpitant image. For a moment he paused behind her; she could not see him. She did not move, she hardly breathed. Her arms were clasped below her bosom, her draperies fell close to her limbs. She resembled indeed a creature of marble in the uncertain waverings of the shifting light. Then gradually he again drew near. He laid his hand upon her gown, where it lay across her feet. With a rapid gesture he drew it away, revealing her delicate light shoe. Still she did not stir. He sank upon his knees, holding the hem of her skirt in his hands.

"Bertha," he said, "who is it that looks at you, a voluptuary or a worshiper?"

"It is the man that I adore," said the young woman, breathing quickly.

"Then here is his act of worship," he said, and glued his mouth for a moment upon her feet.

By and by she stepped down, and they stood on each side of the fire. He did not approach her, it would have seemed sacrilege. But they talked and talked and talked together—talked out their hearts. What words did they speak? The man's tones were those of pleading. And she listened with no will, no wish, no courage to put away a cup of such enchantment. "My beloved," he said to her, "not to see the truth—that is what kills, that is death. Now, we have tasted it. We will take upward paths that mount heavenward. Ours will be a beautiful life. At night we will go upon the waters to see the skies. I will tell you all about the stars. I have studied them. I had forgotten, but now I shall find them all again. Do you know how beautiful Venus is? that her reflection on the sea is sometimes wider than the moon's? I will teach

you these things, and you will teach me to be happy."

"Yes," panted the young woman.

"I will recite to you from the poets. Their songs have come back to me. I thought them sterile dreams. You will go with me into the world, we will conquer it. . . . ." Paradise had caught them. It had taught them melodies that their ears had never known before, melodies that no future could dispel. No pain was theirs to-night, only an excessive joy; and to the woman there was no sting of remorse or of shame. The thought of her friend to whom she was disloyal did not intrude. She was proud as we are of what has been best in ourselves and in another. To-morrow would come the demands of duty, of conscience; perhaps these would speak to disunite and wrench asunder. To-night the earth was only wide enough to hold their love.

"I was yours from the first," sighed

Bertha. "Tell me you have not loved before! tell me."

"I should blaspheme His great name, Madame Le Moyne, if I evoked it for the idle caprices, born of chance and indolence, that have touched my life until now. Ah, God! Bertha, I love you. Do you understand? Does the word pierce your heart?"

"It pierces my heart and burns it, Geoffrey!"

"What will you do with me to-morrow, Bertha? Ah, don't cast me off, sweet one."

She shuddered. "Let us live only in the moment; there is no to-morrow."

"No, Bertha; no to-morrow that can sever us. What is honor? an empty word. What are claims, ties, weighed in the balance of a love like ours?"

"Is it he who risked his life but a few short hours ago, who so speaks now?"

"Bah! what was my life to me then, that I should not have risked it? Now I

have learned the glory and the dignity of life, its truth, its force. With you by my side, I can mock at destiny. Don't ask me to risk my life now, Bertha; I could not. It has grown precious."

And so the night sped on, drawing to its close, and these two sat still apart, yet steeped in one another, in that strange, never-ceasing ecstasy of the everlasting mystery of passion.

"No farther!" she said, as he went to the gate with her, and she touched his lips with her hand. They had not even kissed. She ran from him quickly, and was soon lost to his straining sight.

Odenried came back into his house. A wild joy filled him; he felt himself a god. He knelt again where he had knelt before her, and kissed the place where she had stood so proudly. The room seemed a temple in which, even now, he could catch the faint flutter of divinity. His ears seemed attuned to the soft rustle of the garments of an immortal visitant.

CHAPTER XVI.

MADAME LE MOYNE'S maid came to remove her mistress's breakfast tray before this lady's morning toilet. She found the breakfast untasted. Her mistress herself was sitting up in bed, propped upon her pillows, reading some letters. She was wan as the *impatiens pallida* that grew in the grasses below the garden wall. These letters had been brought to her with her tea and toast, fresh from the early mail. Two only of them had been extricated from the pile. One was from her little son, the other was from Lollia St. Clair. There was one sentence in the latter's letter which tore her soul:

"Thank you, dear, for your belief in me," it said. "It was Christ's faith in the Magdalen, not hers in him, that saved

her. I am trying to be a better woman since you have come to me."

After thirty the reactions of joy are violent. At eighteen to be subjugated is to be convinced, to be conquered is to yield.

Bertha awoke to know that she had met one with whom all the resources of her intellect and her heart left her unable to cope. She knew, too, that she was facing the most solemn moment of her life. If she dallied even for an hour to breathe in of this incense which smelt so sweet, who can say where she would be led! That it was not quite pure gave it increased peril, that peril of dangers which force alone cannot overcome. The first time she had glanced at Odenried, she had felt the shock of his powerful magnetism. She had imagined it to be repellent. Odenried was one of those men who possess the vital temperament. What is it? Easy to feel, hard to define. It explains the attraction certain vicious persons ex-

ert; it is not their vices which attract, it is the superabundance of their emotional temper—an excess of desire which draws, compels, and entices. Such persons fill a room with their silence, where more worthy but smaller people must keep chattering if they would not be insignificant. It exists in both sexes. The actress possesses it of whom one says, "She fills the stage." Geoffrey had it.

Lollia St. Clair's letter was, perhaps, not as sincere as Bertha imagined. Its vague suspicions were well veiled in expressions of trust, reliance, and gratitude. This letter, and her little boy's, shook her strangely. In the cruelty of a cold dawn the rapture of the night was swallowed up. In the keen realities of the written words, it seemed to the young woman as if a starry diadem had been suddenly wrenched from her brows, a scepter from her vanquished hands. The thoughts, sensations, nay the delirium of the night sunk and were blotted out. In vain did sophis-

try allure. In vain did longing, taking the form of virtue, tempt and beckon. In vain did she tell herself that she and Odenried were free, masters of themselves, and of each other—the very thought sent shivers of delight through her frame to her finger-tips. In vain did she tell herself that Lollia was a married woman, and that her love for him was sin, his love for Bertha redemption. In vain did she try to cheat herself with these plausible arguments, these vain delusions. One thing alone remained clear to a nature whose intricacies were yet woven of a straight, single, and simple thread. Bertha's was an honest character. Lollia's letter opened her eyes to her own treachery, if such it might be called; her child's to her duties and their complication. From the heights of a reckless impulse she fell into the dark labyrinth of renunciation. The thought that she thus forced another to tread that humble path she resolutely turned from, as being

another snare of a temptation with which she felt she dared not play. Whatever course he took, it was not hers to guide. The future must look to itself. But oh, how she pitied and loved him! Lollia had trusted her not only with her secret but with her affection, her faith; and from across the seas her child held out his little empty arms, and cried to her, "Come back!" She realized that for the last weeks she had almost entirely forgotten him. He had a great name to bear, a career to fill, her place was at his side. She knew now that one and one alone, through all this summer, had filled her soul and sense; that the dislike she had fancied she felt for him was not born of enmity but of fear. She had feared because she had felt his power; fear had meant love for her. Before she staggered to the window to look out once more upon the pleasant gardens of her old home a great resolve had taken shape within her mind. Why dwell upon it here?

Only those who have made such decisions can comprehend their anguish. To such as have had the courage or the necessity to tear from life all that it holds best it would be but a weary reiteration.

She sent for Odenried. And if she had done so still wavering, still uncertain, that last interview sealed her fate. Who can tell what passed between these two? Whatever frantic protest and furious pleading were his, suffice it for us to know that in a week they had parted, and parted, at her decree, forever, for in a week Bertha Le Moyne was on the sea. Did she imagine that Lollia had not been quite honest with her, that her wrongs were deeper, her claims more positive than she had herself acknowledged? We will respect a doubt which must have borne over Bertha's soul the waves of a death agony. If Lollia's name was mentioned between them, Geoffrey Odenried, whatever were his faults, was a gentleman. A woman's name, at least, with him was

safe. It is a woman's province to protect her honor, a man's her good name. But who shall fathom a man's heart, its vagaries, its bondage, its rebellion? What terrible insight came to poor Bertha's help? I cannot tell. And if what followed were the result of Geoffrey's weakness or of his strength, who dares say?

From her father Bertha parted very tenderly. Her quick perceptions had doubtless fathomed much of the change in his habits of life, which her presence and her influence had inspired. At the *fête*, when he had danced with Miss Maria Horner, her woman's instinct had awakened to a hope which she now declared to him in words. Upon his expressing his regret at her sudden decision to leave him, "Papa," she had said to him, "why don't you marry again?" And when he laughed aloud at the suggestion, "There's Miss Maria Horner," she said

astutely, "I think she likes you very much." So a woman will sacrifice another remorselessly if she deem it wise.

At this Mr. Breckinridge roared, throwing back his head until his face grew purple. "What, that little prim bit of saintliness and an old ogre like your father, Betty?"

He sometimes, now that the first awkwardness was over, called her the pet-name he had given to her babyhood.

"Well, why not? You are good, papa, you are kind; have I not tested it?" she said gently, "and it is breaking my heart to leave you and John all alone."

Shall it be said that the next day Mr. Breckinridge stopped his buggy at the gate of the "Oaks," and handed in a basket of fresh, seabright hen's eggs for "Miss Maria," with "Mr. Breckinridge's compliments!"

"I declare," said her sisters, "if Adrian Breckinridge isn't getting sweet on Maria!"

Miss Maria, tremulous, took her basket

of eggs. It was exactly a year later that she was installed mistress of Breckinridge House.

I have been told that the two men are her slaves, that the timid creature commands the affection and respect of these uncouth and undisciplined gentlemen. Mr. Breckinridge himself is entirely another man, and his wife is a happy woman.

When the great ship neared Liverpool, Bertha, leaning from the deck, saw the tug approaching which was to sever her forever from that last plank that bridged an ocean's width. She stepped down into it with a sense of strange desolation. "That is done!" she thought. As she seated herself upon the narrow seat, she found herself in the vicinity of two young women who immediately attracted and riveted her attention. She had noticed them before in the crowd, on the steamer's lower deck. They had come out in the

tug, and seemed to be seeking for some passenger. They had apparently not found him, and were returning to the shore. The one who sat beside her was a woman of about twenty-five. She was handsome, with a large calm beauty. She had strong, regular features, and ripples of heavy hair under her turban hat. She was well, although not elegantly dressed, evidently belonging to what is known in England as the upper middle class. She had taken off her gloves, which lay on her knees, and her powerful fair hands were clasped together over them. Upon these hands, ever and anon, fell and splashed great round tears. She made no effort to wipe them away from the smooth cheeks down which they poured. Her eyes were wide open, her face set. There was not the quiver of an eyelash. Her lips hardly trembled; but there was about her whole person a dejection so absolute that Bertha's ready sympathies awoke. She suddenly laid her

light fingers upon those of the girl. "You seem very unhappy," she murmured.

The young woman turned and looked at her, and still from her beautiful eyes the drops rained down. "I have boarded every ship for three weeks," she said, in the low husky voice of sorrow, "every ship. I expected a friend. He never, never, never comes."

Her companion, a woman of about thirty, with a sweet, gentle face, looked across at Madame Le Moyne, and just raised her shoulders as if she would say, "What will you have? I humor her," with a glance of answering commiseration. Bertha's soul was wrung by this little unspoken drama, and she continued to clasp the stranger's hand until the tug grated against the quay. "Farewell!" they said to each other, knowing they would meet no more forever. But tears were falling fast from Bertha's own eyes, aye, faster and faster, until she hid them

in her boy's happy face, for there waiting on the dock, were, indeed, little Henri and his tutor and his nurse Mariette.

"My darling, my darling!" said his mother. "Oh, my beloved, I didn't expect to find you here!"

"O *maman! maman!*" cried the little fellow, "I have brought you these roses. I bought them at the *marché* here. See, they are the kind you like!" The boy was full of telling it all, how *Bonne-Maman* had finally consented, the wonders of the Channel passage, and how Mariette had been so sick, so sick, and he not once, not once. And then the journey to London, and the big, black hotel; and then here were these roses!

She took them, and there were more tears. But when she felt her son's little heart fluttering like a bird against her own, they were not bitter ones.

A very few weeks after her return Bertha had received the news that Mr. St.

Clair had died after a day's illness, very unexpectedly. So Lollia was free. She tried in vain to write to her friend, but found she could not. The announcement had produced in her a strange agitation. She therefore compromised upon a cablegram of inquiry concerning Lollia's and Milly's health and welfare. Lollia wrote a short letter with brief details of her husband's illness; a cold letter, and this was all. Bertha answered it, and then the correspondence ceased. In less than a year Madame Le Moyne heard, indirectly, that Geoffrey Odenried and Mrs. St. Clair had been married. Her first informant was Mrs. Mount Cuthbert. This young woman was one of those inveterate correspondents who write to anybody and everybody about anything and everything, upon the slightest provocation. She had, rather to Bertha's surprise, opened the bombardment herself, and although the return missives were infrequent and brief she

continued to throw her shells into the marquise's camp with praiseworthy regularity. A meeting of a few days in Paris, in the spring, had given her professed admiration for Bertha a fresh impetus. She liked to speak of "my friend the Marquise Le Moyne." It sounded well, and had its uses.

Bertha was sitting listlessly one morning in a summer-house that overlooked the fast-flowing Loire. She has changed very little, although her face is thinner than of yore. Her son is sailing his little boat below the bank, with some boy companions who have driven over from a neighboring *château.* Their cries come up to her through the tree-tops, mingling with bird-notes and the flapping of sails.

Her mail is brought to her. She recognizes the Hornersville postmark, and opens a letter from Mrs. Mount Cuthbert. After the first greeting, and reproaches to her indolence as a correspondent, this is what she reads:

"I have just returned from dining at the Odenrieds. There was quite a party. Mrs. Odenried is more fevered and restless even than formerly. She divides her time between Milly, for whom, since her husband's death, she seems to have developed a devout affection—fancy keeping the horrid, spoilt thing with her!—I must confess though, the girl is improving, growing quite pretty all of a sudden—well, as I say, she divides her time between Milly and flirting with young boys. She has got quite a kindergarten about her. Mr. Odenried doesn't seem to mind it much, although a man ought to know that his only dangerous rival is the one to whom his wife or mistress accords nothing. I am quite sure the boys only get laughed at, and that this is their safety and attraction.

"Mr. Odenried is abstracted; more indifferent to everything and everybody than ever, and extremely undemonstrative toward madame. Of course there are all

kinds of queer stories. There always will be about Lollia; she is doomed in that direction. They even go so far as to say that she threatened to kill herself if Odenried did not marry her. If I had been he I would have said, 'Well then, kill yourself and be done with it!' But men are silly—perhaps he was flattered. I dare say—he was always vain——"

Then she went on to speak of Bertha's father. "There's a marriage for you! They seem so fond; really, it is pretty. It took all your French tact to bring that to a fair conclusion. Miss Maria—Mrs. Breckinridge I mean—wears such smart bonnets and looks so rejuvenated and handsome; and your father is the very pink of husbands. Your brother, too, seems very cheery over this new turn of affairs. And they give pleasant little dinners. You were a necromancer——"

Just then a young married lady, a friend of Bertha's, from the adjoining place, stepped across the terrace and came down

quickly, lifting her light skirts from too close contact with the humid herbage. She passed between the marble vases whose gay azaleas, bright and exuberant, created a very orgy of color and perfume.

She found Madame Le Moyne sitting in deep thought. Mrs. Mount Cuthbert's letter had slipped to her feet.

"Ah, *chère*, I stopped to see your grandmamma, and she sent me out to you. She was just going in to have her *riz-au-lait*. What about and where is Monsieur de Meignan? She told me she thought he was here?"

"Why?"

"Why? only because one always expects to find his horse at the door and himself at your feet."

"Ah!"

"Seriously, *chèrie*," said the lady, settling herself on the rustic chair beside her hostess, "seriously, what are you going to do with that young man?"

"What do you suggest that I should

do with him?" asked Bertha, smiling faintly.

"Do with him? Why, simply pull down the fences between your two domains, my dear."

"I suppose," said Bertha quietly, "it would be wise."

"Wise? Well, I should think so! One of the best *partis* in the land, at your beck to leave or take. A splendid name, a large fortune, no serious vices, and such adoration!"

"I believe he cares—a little."

"Tut tut! you know he cares a great deal. Why, it passes my comprehension, it is insensate. The old lady just spoke to me, begged me to advise you to make up your mind to the step. Why, Bertha, what more can you desire?"—"How listless and cold she is!" thought her friend, "the Americans are like that." A lack of quick speech and dramatic response passed to her for a poverty of emotion. "What folly at your age!

so lovely and surrounded. It is not natural."

"I agree with you."

"Bertha, tell me"—the lady moved nearer.

"What would you know?" asked Bertha, looking up and fixing her friend with an intensity of gaze.

"Have you—have you . . ."

"I know what you wish to ask. You want to probe my heart to its very heart, to know if I have loved." She spoke rapidly. In her arose that sudden craving for expansion—that desire to tell all, which sweeps at times over reserved natures. It matters little then who the listener may be. The hour has come; one must speak or die. "Then, I will tell you," said Madame Le Moyne, rising. She was deathly pale, and her eyes were large and almost stern. "I have not loved—I have not loved—I love—I love! with a passion which is as hopeless, as futile, as

purposeless and dark as the currents of the black whirlpool at the foot of the *grande colline*, where old Pierre Conti's corpse was found tossing helplessly to and fro, at the last St. Hubert. It is a poignant wound which bleeds and cries to me day and night, but it has been the poem of my life. I will not wrench it away. I could not exist. And with this in my soul would you have me marry Monsieur de Meignan—he who offers me so much? I cannot, I will not! I have been a fool—perhaps—who knows? I thought myself heroic. I tried to do right, but I was not as strong as I had thought. I would not take happiness. Now it is too late." She wrung her hands, and still paced up and down before the entrance of the summer house.

There was a pause. "I thank you, dear," said her friend, in a low voice, "and I will confess to you now that I have never understood you. Yet, though I have thought you cold, I had yet seen

upon your face traces of suffering. But you know I am a skeptic. My motto has been *au fond de tout il n'y a rien.* I am a pessimist, not after Pascal, who can analyze all our frightful moral misery, to absolve himself in God, but like Voltaire, I fear, who scourges, bites, tears, mangles those ideals which we recklessly give our hopes and our destinies. Believe me, dear, no man is worth loving so much——" and she sighed.

"I believe you, but my pessimism is not a doctrine; it is a secret pain, incurable, born of a strange problem which once came upon my pathway, and that perhaps I failed to read aright. It has dragged with me through the years, but the deeper it lies in my heart the stronger has been my pride to conceal it. My pride is dear to me and sweet. If the joy of a spirit marks its strength, then, indeed, I am weak, for I am miserable; yet, who can tell—the happiness that was offered me came at too great

a cost—perhaps it was not meant that earthly love should be for me; perhaps some day, through my great sacrifice, I shall find peace. I have nursed a phantom—I am weary. But come, dear; it grows chill——" and Bertha, with a quick gesture, drew up over her shoulders the wrap that had fallen from them.

CHAPTER XVII.

BERTHA and Geoffrey were to meet once more, and their meeting was on this wise. The marquise went to Vienna in the spring, to visit the Princess de M——, an old friend of her husband's family. This lady, who had been a leader of fashion at more than one Continental court, who had been the idol of Paris salons, and their terror, whose *bons mots* had sent ripples of laughter through Europe, whose witty repartees had thrilled two continents, whose vagaries had given food for gossip to a gaping world, whose toilets had been copied, whose ugly features and exquisite figure had been photographed and painted by numberless artists, who had awakened a hundred impotent rivalries, and had been the cause of a dozen duels, was fond

of the graceful, refined American. She insisted upon conveying her, the very night of her arrival, to her *loge* at the opera. Madame Le Moyne had complained of a slight fatigue; but the announcement of a favorite prima donna, singing for the first time in the rôle of *Elsa*, had conquered her expiring determination to remain in her friend's boudoir. After the refreshment of an hour's slumber, and of a gay little dinner of congenial acquaintances, she had consented to accompany the princess.

When they entered the opera house it was already nearly full. The first act was over, the curtain had fallen, and only the orchestra was filling the vast *salle* with the threatening uneasiness of Wagner's pregnant genius. The frivolous were chatting over each others' shoulders in the boxes, or were adjusting their lorgnettes in the parquet. Many were raised toward the Princess de M——'s box, and she and her lovely guest evoked a

large share of attention and of curiosity. Some of the women were lying back upon their cushions, resting after the strain of the first outbursts of song, returning from legend and symbolism, from the heroic and the exalted to the realism of masculine compliment, white cravats, and *bonbons frappés.*

The serious, who had come to receive profound æsthetic impressions, were still intent upon the score, beating time with fan or cane, absorbed and breathless.

Two gentlemen, directly under the princess's box, were discussing the meaning of the theme, that theme which appeals so warmly to our fancy. Is not the unknown the eternal secret of our pleasures? "Lohengrin" is of our day. It speaks to us and makes us shiver. Its subject matter is of consequence. It is not a mere question if the lover shall marry or slay his mistress, or the polished traitor be found out and punished. It is not the mere amusement of an hour, the

pastime of the *désœuvré*. It is poignant, because each one of us can translate it to suit his or her own fantasy. And as we are always very interesting to ourselves, we enter at once into sincere emotion. The theme is large enough to incarnate all the personages whose rôles are played out in the evening of a century made vague with doubts, and crushed by their despair. There is a bond between our generation and this ancient myth which speaks to the heart.

"*Elsa*," said one of the gentleman, "represents humanity. *Lohengrin*, who comes to her at the crisis of her destiny, is faith. *Ortrud* is skepticism, or science, if you will so name her, imposing her questionings and her torments upon the surprised and troubled soul. Science—pride—with its haughty, impetuous interrogations."

"Ah," said the other, "you make a gigantic drama then, the drama of the century, and we materialists who seek the

beautiful at the expense of the real, are ourselves participators, players in the great performance."

"Yes, in many of us is a lost *Lohengrin!*"

"Or an *Elsa*, preparing our own misfortune——"

"One day doubt seizes us; we would analyze, know all, and faith, like the swan, opens its wings and flees away."

"Yes, gone up to inaccessible heights, leaving us uncertain, groping, sightless. What are we all indeed but Marionettes?" The man sighed.

Madame Le Moyne could hear their words between the vibration of the instruments, and the chatter of two young girls in an adjacent box. "Yes," she thought, "even our martyrdoms now have lost the rewards of faith. They are right; we are but puppets."

She and the princess were the only women in their *loge*. They were accompanied by four gentleman. One box di-

rectly opposite to theirs was still vacant. On such a gala night, when seats had been sold at fabulous prices, and obtained with infinite difficulty, it did not seem probable that it would remain so. Its occupants were doubtless only belated.

The curtain rose again, and all was hushed. *Elsa*, blond, subtle, svelte, awoke attention, then charmed it. Her first solo was received with a storm of enthusiasm. Those who had doubted her power in other rôles were satisfied now. She was the *Elsa, par excellence*, poetic, ideal. In other parts she had lacked fire, but in this—where the demand was for airiness and grace, for a certain star-like quality—she proved herself competent.

Bertha accorded but scant attention to the man who sat behind her, and ever and anon whispered some word of flattery in her ears. All to the music, she was even freer than usual, to-night, from the slight-

est approach to coquetry. Generally indifferent, to-night she was of ice.

It was during a long and somewhat ponderous recitative that the door of the opposite box swung open. Two ladies entered. They stopped for a moment, in the shadow, disencumbering themselves of their opera cloaks, then came forth suddenly, into the light. Indolently raising her opera-glass, Bertha looked across at the newcomers.

"I'll wager," said the princess, in her high-bred staccato voice, "that those are compatriots of yours."

"And why, pray?" said Bertha languidly, tugging at her glass, not yet sure of the right focus.

"Because the women are *chic*, and the men not at all so."

"You do Madame Le Moyne's compatriots injustice this time," said Monsieur de Meignan, who sat at the princess's elbow. "There is a remarkably handsome and distinguished man in that party."

"*Mon Dieu!* I have not seen anything of that sort for so long," said the princess. "Lend me your lorgnette, De Meignan, and let me have a look at him, it will do me good. *En effet*," she said, after a moment. "He is very well."

"Very well, why he is a *très bel homme*, a little heavy perhaps——"

"The lady with the dark hair seems to be quite imposing, and now I think of it, I am sure I have seen that face before. Let me remember, I think it was at the ball at the American Legation, in Paris, some years ago; at the Heathcotes', where she made a sensation. She is very well conserved."

De Meignan craned forward, "*Connais pas*—but a handsome person. The fine-looking man is presumably the husband. The little blonde is insignificant."

"I find her piquante," said one of the party, who had been relegated to a back seat, hated Wagner, and was bored.

"The man who is talking to her is very ordinary, *épicier*."

"How old a person should you think the *brune* to be?"

"Oh, thirty-eight or thereabouts. It is difficult to judge at this distance. She makes a good effect."

"And why shouldn't she make a good effect?" said the Princess. "I am thirty-nine—I wouldn't tell everybody; but here, *entre amis*—I am thirty-nine, and I propose to be effective, admirably effective, for ten years more at the very least. You are impolite."

"The *épicier* is, I infer, the husband of the other one. He——"

"What powers of divination!" said Bertha quietly. "You are right. He is her husband."

"*Tiens!* Are they friends of yours?"

"Yes, I know them all."

"And will that fascinator come and talk to us? Make him a sign, Bertha, so, with your fan. Signify to him that

our own gentlemen are very tiresome, very dull, not gallant, that we are half asleep, that we want to be waked up. I am quite agitated at the thought of seeing him *de près*, but you are as calm, as calm——"

The gentlemen entered a protest, "We are not tiresome, we are not dull, but when you won't give us anything but the backs of your *chignons*, and you are all eyes for another, what can you expect of us?"

"Bah! why did you point him out to us, and inflame our imaginations? Bertha, why don't you do what I ask of you—you who have only to look at a man with your queer eyes to enslave him? You might signal, too, for the little ordinary man. I think he looks amusing. I like him. What is his name?"

"Mount Cuthbert, and the plump woman is his wife. The two men in the back of the box I do not know."

"Well, and the others—the striking couple?"

"That is Mrs. St. Clair, an old friend of my childhood's."

"Mrs. St. Clair?"

"No—Odenried, I mean—I made a mistake."

"Ah, she was a widow then, before——"

"Yes—and then she married Mr.—Odenried."

"Ah, and is he nice, Monsieur Odenried?"

"Yes—he is—nice."

"And is that all?"

Bertha swayed from side to side in her chair. She wondered if she could live through it. The orchestra thundered its imprecations and *Ortrud*, the pagan, filled *Elsa's* foolish heart with the poisonous fumes of infamous suspicion—problem ancient as a universe, in which one fears to move in the dark lest one should wound someone else or one's self.

Very soon she knew that Geoffrey had seen her. She felt him looking over where she sat, trembling. Lollia did not seem to recognize her. She was bending toward the stage, engrossed in the performance. Mount Cuthbert had apparently withdrawn into the lobby, and his wife had almost turned her back to the audience, to talk to one of the other men. Bertha too turned mechanically toward the *rampe;* she feared to meet his eyes. However distant, would not their glance rob her of all her self-control? Would she cry out or faint, she asked herself, she whose whole life had been one long repression, she who was patient and so valiant? She who had put away from her this great temptation, and had unflinchingly come back to be the light and guidance of a dying life and of a budding one. And she had been cheerful, had done her part bravely, none suspecting its hidden effort.

De Meignan went out to smoke a

cigarette. Madame Le Moyne seemed to him more *distraite*, more unapproachable than ever. The princess chattered on, caustic, reckless, commenting upon the audience, their dress, manners, genealogies; upon the actors, their abilities, training, talents. The music rose and fell, swelled and sank, and still Bertha was conscious of those eyes fixed upon her from that dark corner beyond the sea of faces that divided. And so —a little later, when she saw him get up and go out of the red-curtained doorway through which Mount Cuthbert had but lately disappeared, she knew her hour had come! Five minutes at the most, no more, to bid her wildly beating heart be still.

He sat beside her! His voice, so often heard in dreams, in her ears—at last. It was not as she had expected, no, not in the least. Her excitement fell. She found herself quiet and emotionless, almost commonplace. It was like falling from the

heights of eloquence into the colloquial and the familiar.

The young people in the next box were amused at something; they were shrill and voluble. Madame Le Moyne, like all imaginative people, had lived this scene out so many times before! It came, and found her unprepared. He, too, seemed ill attuned to this strange meeting under a myriad curious eyes, amid light and laughter.

They spoke of Wagner, of the diva, of the ineffective tenor, of the difficult rôles of *Ortrud* and *Telramund.* She noticed that he had grown stouter. She spoke of it to him, pushed by a nervous irritability. "Yes," he said, "I am beginning to care about my food; there is nothing else——"

"Oh!" and iron fingers seemed to be catching at her throat.

"I didn't use to care much about the joys of the table," he said, "in my romantic days, but they are well over. How

unchanged you are!" She breathed out something whose meaning he could not catch. "Yes, unchanged."

"Do you not ride any more?" she asked after a pause, "or pull a boat? You were so fond of exercise once!"

"I haven't even had the *Baby* out this summer, and I turned King Harry to pasture three years ago, and haven't thrown a leg across a horse since then."

"You were so fond of exercise!" she found herself repeating mechanically. Could anything be more trivial! And was this all they had to say?

"Was I? I have almost forgotten what I used to be—fond of."

There was a note of pain in that dear voice to which her heart leapt up in her white breast, ah, yes! so dear! "I don't believe you have forgotten—everything," she said.

"And you?" He leaned so near that his breath touched her. He took her fan, where it lay upon her knees, with his old

caressing gesture. He played with it a moment. "Have you forgotten everything?" She did not answer. "Have you forgotten the evening when you brought me the wine? *Tell* me."

"Your question is cruel!" but she turned, and in her eyes he read the answer. In his had been revealed to her a great heart-hunger. Hers filled.

They spoke a few more words, so low, so low that the princess—who was a little curious at the turn affairs had taken, and watched them furtively, with newly awakened interest—although she tried very hard to hear them, found she could not. "There is a tragedy enacted here," thought this great lady, "as well as on the stage to-night." Then moved by a sudden impulse, mayhap of kindness, she murmured some excuse about the heat and glare, and rose and drew away into the further recess of the *loge*, leaving them thus—alone.

By and by he, too, arose, and took

Madame Le Moyne's cold hand. He held it for an instant in both his own. "Good-by!" he said, lingering, "good-by!"

"Good-by!" she faltered.

THE END.